

# COUPLE LINKS

LASTING INTIMACY THROUGH NURTURING, KNOWLEDGE, & SKILLS



INSTRUCTOR MANUAL 9.0

All rights reserved. Any reproduction requires the prior written consent of John Van Epp, Ph.D.

Copyright © 1997, 2011, 2014, 2020 by John Van Epp, Ph.D.

**LINKS 9.0 PnP Edition: LINKS Instructor Manual**

For more information and/or purchasing additional products contact:

John Van Epp, Ph.D.  
Love Thinks, LLC  
info@LoveThinks.com  
www.LoveThinks.com

Printed in the United States of America

# CONTENTS

---

---

	Page
<b>Section One: The Mechanics of Group Formation and Program Delivery</b>	
<i>Getting Started: An Overview of the Instructor Manual</i> .....	3
Materials in the Instructor Certification Packet.....	4
Workbooks for Class Participants.....	5
First Steps in Preparing to Teach a LINKS Class.....	6
Setting Up a LINKS Class.....	6
Class Formats.....	7
Teaching a LINKS Class.....	8
Instructor Helps.....	8
<b>Section Two: The Five Sessions of the LINKS Program</b>	
Session One: Lesson Plans.....	10
Session Two: Lesson Plans.....	32
Session Three: Lesson Plans.....	69
Session Four: Lesson Plans.....	90
Session Five: Lesson Plans.....	108
<b>Section Three: Two Page Instructor Overviews for LINKS Sessions</b>	
Session One.....	129
Session Two.....	131
Session Three.....	133
Session Four.....	135
Session Five.....	137
<b>Section Four: Participant Workbook for Instructor Notes</b>	
Sessions 1-5.....	139
<b>Section Five: Article Summarizing Research that Supports LINKS</b>	
Article .....	221



# MECHANICS OF GROUP FORMATION & PROGRAM DELIVERY



## SECTION ONE

### The Mechanics of Group Formation & Program Delivery

#### Getting Started: An Overview of the Instructor Manual

Congratulations! Facilitating a LINKS class is exciting and adventurous. Best of all, you will learn more by teaching the program than you would if you just attended.

This *Instructor Manual* is divided into three sections:

#### **Section One: *The Mechanics of Group Formation and Program Delivery***

This first section is designed to provide you with the needed tools to form a class, choose a format, and facilitate discussion around the most important areas.

#### **Section Two: *The Five Lesson Plans of the LINKS Program***

This second section is divided into the five sessions. Each session has a detailed lesson plan for that session. These lesson plans match the LINKS 9.0 power points with or without video segments, and also match the *LINKS Discussion Workbook*.

#### **Section Three: *Sample Workbook with Note Pages***

This section is a sample LINKS greyscale workbook with blank pages for notes inserted throughout. At the top of the Note pages are references to the lesson plans pages that correspond with that specific area of the workbook.

#### **Section Four: *Two-Page Session Outlines***

The lesson plans for each of the five sessions are summarized in a 2-page outline that match the LINKS 9.0 power points. Included in each outline are the video segments of Dr. John and Dr. Morgan and brief explanations of how to integrate these video segments in the discussions, activities and small group breakouts of each session.

#### **Section Five: *Research Summary of the LINKS Program***

This article was written to summarize many of the research studies that have supported the five bonds of the RAM, the skills that predict relationship proficiency, and the virtues that are imbedded in the RAM.

#### **Optional Section: *The Faith-Based Presentation (C.-LINKS)***

This section can be downloaded from the Registered Instructor Section on [www.lovethinks.com](http://www.lovethinks.com) website and is a Christian-based Bible study of the five sessions of the LINKS program. It follows the

same basic outlines of the LINKS program and is integrated into the program sessions in the C-LINKS workbook. However, each session is divided into two sessions (part one and part two) because of the amount of material to be taught. The power point that matches the C-LINKS workbook is also a free download from the Instructor Section of the [www.LoveThinks.com](http://www.LoveThinks.com) website.

When you lead a class, you do not need to know the answer to every question. Too many times we stress ourselves out trying to make sure we never get stumped. But this is not what a class usually expects. What they DO really want from you is a sincere openness and concern for what they have to share, and a gentle guidance to keep the discussion on track.

The better you understand the RAM™ (Relationship Attachment Model™), the easier it will be for you to instruct a class. Class participants will often want to share their experiences which confirm or validate the material in each session. I highly recommend a discussion period and that you use the session exercises and activities in the lesson plans (additional resources can be found in the Registered Instructor Section under the Instructor tab--you gain access after your certification is completed). The LINKS course generates a significant amount of thought and identification with almost all couples of varying ages. You will be exceptionally pleased at the way this program crosses generational gaps. The discussion will personalize the material and help the participants to apply it to their lives.

Do not be afraid of sharing some of your own experiences—your understanding and confidence in the program will be contagious.

Finally, thank you for your support and involvement in the presentation of the LINKS relationship course. I have become more and more convinced that couples today need a plan to be relationship managers. With your help, couples can learn how to develop the habit of regularly reviewing the closeness in their relationship and making the necessary adjustments to keep their relationship on course while lessening the risks of negative ruts and a deterioration of their intimacy.

### **Materials in the Instructor Certification Packet**

Each session is presented in a 2-hour class. The sessions can be expanded to 10 if the instructor chooses. This course can be taught by certified instructors with or without the use of the video segments in the LINKS 9.0 PnP Power point. This *Instructor Manual* provides the background of research and theory for the program, and a detailed lesson plan for each of the sessions. These lesson plans

enable the instructor to teach the program with or without the use of the video segments. The 2-page session overviews included in your Instructor Manual (and also downloadable from the 9.0 platform) explain how to use the video segments of Dr. John and Dr. Morgan for teaching sections of these lesson plans. This allows you to be a facilitator of large group discussions, small breakout group discussions and activities, and to have minimal teaching responsibilities throughout this course.

Your Instructor Certification Packet should include these items.

1. Instructor Manual (with a mini-RAM)
2. Instructor Certification Course (on the LINKS 9.0 platform)
3. 4 Power points of the LINKS Program (on the LINKS 9.0 platform)
  - a. LINKS Adult (without the video segments of Dr. John & Dr. Morgan)
  - b. LINKS Adult (with the video segments of Dr. John & Dr. Morgan)
  - c. LINKS Military (without the video segments of Dr. John & Dr. Morgan)
  - d. LINKS Military (with the video segments of Dr. John & Dr. Morgan)
  - e. Additional power points and instructor materials may be added on this platform in the future. These additions will automatically show up on your LINKS 9.0 platform whenever you access it.
4. Trifold R.A.M. Board
5. *Becoming Better Together: the RAM plan for growing together when life is pulling you apart* book

### **Workbooks for Class Participants**

There are various workbooks for participants. The primary program workbook is the *LINKS Participant Workbook*. Instructors should provide each class participant with a *LINKS Participant Workbook* which is designed to assist with the outline and content of the five sessions, as well as the application of the material through personal application/discussion questions located throughout the workbook. A variation of this workbook includes the *Military LINKS Workbook*.

The *C-LINKS Participant Workbook* (C for Christian) contains the *LINKS Discussion Workbook* in its entirety and is integrated with a faith-based Bible study. This workbook contains 10-lessons.

Instructors can purchase both workbooks at a discounted price on [www.lovethinks.com](http://www.lovethinks.com) by simply using the coupon code on the Instructor section of the [www.LoveThinks.com](http://www.LoveThinks.com) website (this section is only accessible by certified instructors). A sample LINKS adult workbook is included in this Manual.

## **First Steps in Preparing to Teach a LINKS Class**

### **1. Home Study Course**

Watch the *Instructor Certification Course* on found on the LINKS 9.0 platform. This is accessible to certified instructors. It is recommended that you take notes in the sample workbook in the *Instructor Manual* and then after each video session read the lesson plans for that session. You can write any additional questions or ideas you would use for discussion or homework in the note pages in the sample workbook.

### **2. Accessing the LINKS 9.0 Platform**

You should have received an email at the time of purchase for this Instructor Certification Packet (ICP) or shortly after you attended a live training that prompted you to set up your account at [www.online.mylovethinks.com](http://www.online.mylovethinks.com) so that you can access your Instructor Training Videos and Power Points.

Once you have created your account and are able to access your LINKS 9.0 materials, you can re-access this platform from the original email, or by going to [www.online.mylovethinks.com](http://www.online.mylovethinks.com) and click "SIGN IN". Here you can enter your logon information and then access your videos.

If you do not have your email and did NOT set up an account, go to [www.online.mylovethinks.com](http://www.online.mylovethinks.com) and click "SIGN IN". Enter your email address and then click "FORGOT PASSWORD". Your password will be reset, and then you should be able to access the LINKS 9.0 Platform.

## **Setting Up a LINKS Class**

There are three defining characteristics to a class. These are membership, participation, and written work.

### **1. Membership**

There are two types of class memberships: closed or open. The first, a closed class, requires that the same members attend each session. New members are not allowed to join once the class is established. An example of this type of class is an educational class or retreat. Because of the consistency of the membership, the instructor can connect the sessions (e.g. with homework, with discussions about previous sessions and their topics, with assignments for the next session).

The second, an open class, permits new members to attend every session. In this type, each session may consist of members who have not attended any previous meetings. An example of this type of class is a single's meeting or a youth group. The instructor needs to be more cautious about connecting the sessions. It is important to design each session to "stand on its own" while still reviewing the previous subjects and providing continuity.

## **2. Participation**

The LINKS course is designed to have lots of *participation*. Participants must use the workbook and the mini-RAMs for applying and personalizing the material from the five sessions. It is important for the instructor 1) to keep the group on task, 2) to maintain control over each individual/couple's participation so that all of the content of the session is covered, and 3) to minimize any imbalance of one or more members dominating the discussion.

## **3. Written work**

Most of the discussion questions are used in the class as either large group discussion, or small breakout group discussion. A few can be assigned as homework. Discussion questions are primarily used in three ways: to facilitate whole group discussion, to have couples talk through their relationship, and to have small groups work on their answers and then explain their answers to the rest of the class. Some questions are also included in an activity that is described in the instructor lesson plans.

If any of the discussion questions are assigned as homework, then they can be briefly discussed at the beginning of the next session. This can be used to review the previous session.

## **Class Formats**

The lesson plans in the Instructors Manual for the five sessions of the LINKS A PARTNER™ program are based on a 2-hour class but can be conducted in a variety of formats. Additional classes can be used to teach the program if needed (e.g. divide each session into two parts and expand the class to 10 sessions that are 1-hour each).

There are some settings that may require a novel class format. However, several priorities should be maintained. First, follow the outline of the five sessions and cover the material. Second, keep the sessions in order. If there is a desire to end on the topic of commitment, keep the sessions in order but circle back at the end of Session Five to have a commitment ceremony for couples (this is described in the lesson plans). Third, encourage both discussion and homework- the more participants put into the material, the more they will take from the material.

## **Five Class Format**

This format consists of five 2-hour classes. It can be used with an open or closed class. Large and small group discussions and the activities can be very dynamic and personal with this amount of time. A few questions can be assigned

for homework from the workbook for personal growth. Instructors should use activities and discussion questions to generate experiential learning.

### **Six – Ten Class Format**

This format consists of additional classes, usually because class time is limited. This can be formatted to split the sessions so that more discussion can be allowed within each class, or to fit each entire lesson in a two 1-hour classes.

### **Retreat Formats**

You can teach LINKS in 1-day, 2-day or 3-day retreat formats. One-day makes for a long day and will require reducing some of the material covered. Two-day works much better with 6-hour days: Day1: Sessions 1-2; Day 2: Sessions 3-5. The three-day retreat is one of the best formats. On a weekend— Friday evening: Session 1; Saturday morning: Session 2-3; Saturday evening: Session 4; Sunday morning: Session 5.

### **Formats for C-LINKS**

The C-LINKS course is designed for two classes on each session. The Bible study is integrated with the content from the entire LINKS course. The C-LINKS power point which can be downloaded from the Registered Instructor Section of the website provides outlines and *additional instructor notes* for teaching C-LINKS and where the sessions are divided. In addition, video tutorials for the Bible study are found in the Instructor Certification Course on the 9.0 Platform. C-LINKS participant workbooks which match the power point can be purchased in the online store.

## **Teaching a LINKS Class**

The lesson plans are very extensive. They contain a teaching script with additional instructor tips, ideas for the discussion questions, times and topics for deeper discussion and instruction, activities/exercises that can be used in each session. A summary of the research and theory on the crucial areas covered in the specific sessions is also included in this Manual. The lesson plans are designed to be used with any age group, youth to older adults.

## **Instructor Helps**

**The bold type in the grey highlight is the teacher’s suggested “script,”** and additional instructor notes and suggestions are in regular type.



**“TIME”** This provides you with a suggested amount of time for each major section of the lesson. It is based on a 2-hour class. You can abbreviate the classes if necessary, but this timeframe allows for discussion, class exercises and interaction.



**"DISCUSSION QUESTION"** This introduces a discussion question taken from the participant's P.I.C.K. Workbook. Suggested points of discussion and additional ideas are presented with the *questions which are written in bold, italicized red print*. Be sure to choose which questions you want to discuss in class and which ones you want to assign for homework BEFORE you teach.



**"DIG DEEPER"** This indicates a topic that requires more critical thinking of the participants. In some cases, this deeper investigation of a subject is optional.



**"TOOLBOX"** This references a suggested activity/handout that can be used to increase involvement of the participants, apply the concepts of the session in a practical fashion, and facilitate discussion.



**"DEEP THOUGHT"** This introduces the proverb that summarizes and closes each session.



# LESSON PLANS



## OVERVIEW OF SESSION ONE

This first session begins with an overview of the Relationship Attachment Model (RAM) and its five love links: knowledge, trust, reliance, commitment and sexual touch. Next, the principles of the RAM are discussed. A formula for *knowing* your partner is outlined and described. Healthy communication is a means to the end of developing closeness and intimacy in this first love link: *deeply knowing each other*.

### Goals

1. Learn the RAM and how it helps to visualize the bonds of closeness and intimacy in your relationship.
2. Cultivate a belief in couples being RELATIONSHIP MANAGERS who put continued effort in building and *running* the closeness and intimacy in marriage.
3. Develop an understanding of what makes a relationship safe and how a relationship develops vulnerabilities. Understand the natural “drops” in the RAM and how they can affect your marital relationship.
4. Learn the formula for maintaining the “knowing-each-other” in your relationship.
5. Understand the components of communication and how to practice healthy patterns of talking together and avoid destructive communication patterns.

### Lesson-At-a-Glance

A. Five Principles of the RAM	45 minutes
B. Formula for “Knowing”	15 minutes
C. Talk Time	40 minutes
STEP ONE Catch Up (KNOW)	20 minutes

### Material Checklist

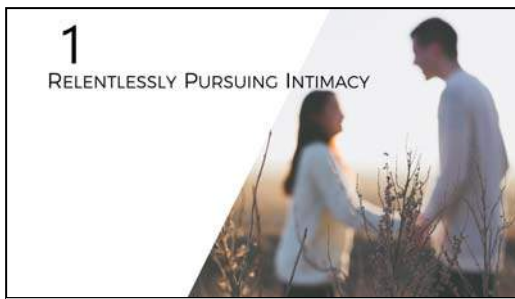
Use the Relationship Attachment Model® (RAM) display board. This hands-on teaching tool represents the core of this curriculum and is an excellent visual aid. You must use the LINKS workbooks (several versions available for ordering through [www.lovethinks.com](http://www.lovethinks.com)). Each workbook comes with a mini-RAM. It is beneficial to have one workbook per individual in the class. You will also need to have a dry erase board or a paper (preferably) to write additional notes. The paper notes can be taped on the walls to provide further visual aids to the accumulating material. A power point projector and screen is needed. The lesson plans provide the outline and structure for each session and are printed throughout the lesson plans. They also match the LINKS workbooks for participants.

**SESSION ONE**  
RELENTLESSLY PURSUING INTIMACY



This slide stays on the screen as participants enter and find their seats. Mingle with the class and make sure that everyone has their workbooks and is opened to the first session. Also, if your participants do not have assigned seats, try to keep the seating in your class relatively close so that there is not a lot of empty

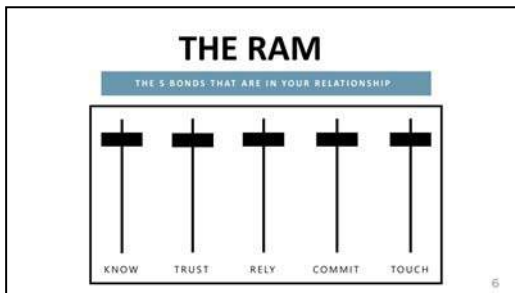
space and helps with group cohesion and discussion. *It is strongly suggested that you have groups of 3-5 couples at tables. Many of the activities and exercises throughout the LINKS course make use of small group interactions.*



Welcome the class as the words are dropping down on the screen. Explain the title: **Welcome to our class- Marriage L.I.N.K.S.** The word "L.I.N.K.S." is an acronym for Lasting Intimacy through Nurturing Knowledge and Skills... and that is what these classes will be about:

how you can maintain a strong bond of closeness throughout your relationship. A model of intimacy is the core of this program, but you will also learn how to achieve and keep this intimacy by gaining a better understanding and knowledge, learning about the importance of nurturing each other, and sharpening skills of communication and conflict resolution.

**A. Five Principles of the RAM**  **45 minutes**



Introduce the first session with this slide. Say something like: **This first session provides an overview of the Relationship Attachment Model- which you will come to know as the RAM. In fact, this class will be easy to remember and understand because this course simply teaches the RAM—there are five**

**sessions, one on each of the five links of this model. Let me introduce this model by walking through five principles of the RAM.**

**The first principle is that the RAM is A PICTURE OF YOUR RELATIONSHIP because each of these five areas are BONDING contributing some feeling of connection and closeness in the relationship. In your**



**workbook please write this after the green #1.** It is important to have participants write in their workbooks and you should encourage it, especially in the beginning of session 1. **The RAM provides a simple yet comprehensive picture of your relationship and the major sources**

**of bond, closeness and connection in your relationship.** You can point to the RAM board as you explain each of the five areas, and little explanation is all that is needed at this point in the course.



**“DIG DEEPER”** Although you do not need to explain why this is, the bonding dynamics correspond to five basic aspects of the self: 1) the *sensory self* takes in info through the five senses and contributes the bond of knowing; 2) the *mental self* organizes what you learn from the sensory self and forms mental pictures of people that contribute the bond of trusting; 3) the *emotional self* provides ranges of emotion and emotional needs, contributing the bond of relying. 4) the *volitional self* provides the need for social contact and relationships, and contributes the bond of committing; and, 5) the *physical/sexual self* provides the drives and desires for affection, physical touch and sexual interaction and contributes the bond of touch.

At this point you can briefly explain each of the five bonding dynamics that contribute to the overall feeling of closeness in a relationship--below are some descriptions of each--however, it may be enough to just point at the RAM and acknowledge the contribution of each of the five dynamic links to the overall relationship bond.

**KNOW: Getting to know someone is bonding. Think about the ways you and your spouse know each other. This feeling of knowing your partner can be very bonding- and it goes both ways. Feeling known by your spouse is also bonding.** You can use numerous examples from the initial meeting when two partners first get to know each other, to the longevity of a relationship and how deeply those two partners feel that they know and are known by a partner more than anyone else could rival. Openness and *feeling known* create strong feelings of connection with another person. **A best friend is often described as someone who “knows me better than anyone!” This description implies a strong bond because of the extent of openness. How much more should it be true of marriage partners?**

**TRUST: Another description of a best friend is your “most trusted friend.” In other words, the more you trust, the more you feel connected or**

bonded. We will define trust a little differently than you may be used to- trust is the *mental picture* you have of your spouse. From what you know about your partner, you put together a dynamic mental picture of him or her. The more you know, the more accurate this picture should be... and this picture tells you if you can trust your partner or not. This is why we will refer to trust as the *trust-picture* you develop your partner. You could also think of this as **your opinion of them.** More about this concept is described in Session Two, but, at this point, you are trying to provide the groundwork of understanding the concept of trust.

**RELY:** The third bonding dynamic is reliance. This refers to the *action of trust*. Reliance grows from the ways that you look to your partner to meet your needs, and the ways that your partner also depends on you to meet their needs. Your relationship grows as you work together to meet each others' needs. **OPTION:** If you want to develop this a little more, ask the class for some examples of ways that they depend on each other, and what are some typical needs that are met in a marriage relationship. Some examples would include companionship, support, understanding, fun and recreation.

**COMMIT:** The fourth bonding dynamic is commitment. This refers to the *extent you are invested in each other; the ways that you belong to your spouse in your relationship*. The extent to which you feel that you belong to your partner and that they belong to you is a measure of the degree of commitment in your relationship. Commitment not only is a major source of your closeness and relationship bond, it keeps you together during difficult times. You can clarify the differences between healthy and unhealthy ownership at this point if you have time and the class would benefit from this discussion. Unhealthy ownership usually lacks respect of the person, resulting in one person losing self in the enmeshment with the other. You could say that one person becomes just an extension of the other, without any sense of identity of their own. Healthy ownership creates a strong feeling of security in the relationship while both individuals are respected and able to function independent of each other. **Loyalty to your partner flows from the promises you have made in marriage and the deep feeling that *I belong to you and you belong to me.* The bond that results from this commitment is obvious.**

**TOUCH:** The final bonding dynamic is touch. Obviously, this is a strong contributor to a feeling of intimacy and closeness in a marriage relationship. The bonding influence of this dynamic is evident even everything from affectionate non-sexual touch to intimate sexual touch. You can explain more if needed, but Session Five explores this dynamic more extensively.

The second principle is that **ONE THING LEADS TO ANOTHER**, in other



words, these five dynamics are *interactive*. They help to visualize the conflicting ways that a relationship sometimes feels- like, “I am committed to you, but sometimes you are not there for me to depend on.” Or, “I know we are really close, but sometimes it seems I don’t know you because we have lost touch with each other.”

There is a logical progression to the five bonding dynamics. In other words, one dynamic leads to the next. For instance, what you know about your spouse leads you to decide if you can trust your partner. Your level of trust leads you to decide if you should depend on them to meet your needs. And your commitment is shaken if you know something that bothers you about your partner, or you do not feel that you can trust or rely on them. And sexual involvement feels the most right in marriage when the other dynamics-knowing, trusting, depending and committing are all at a high level.



However, when something affects one of these areas of your relationship it will automatically affect some of the other areas. For instance, what would happen if something compromised your trust in your relationship? What effect

would this lowered level of trust have on the other five levels. You would wait and guide the class to identifying the fact that the lowered trust would pull down the other levels.



**“DISCUSSION QUESTION”** *If you lower the level of one of the “links” of the RAM, how will this affect the overall relationship and each of the other four links?* Ideas: When one link is lowered it pulls the others down...but also when one link is improved in a relationship it influences the other links to move up. This is the hope of what you want the couples to experience during this class. While some levels are out of balance with others, you can tell the class:

At this point, you can further illustrate the ways that these bonding areas interact by humorously stating: **You can hang the miniRAM on the refrigerator. It is a way to communicate with each other without even talking!** For instance, if you’re your partner is up before you and you come to get your morning coffee only to find the “know” slider at the bottom, (move the know slider to the bottom) then you need to find your partner and do some talkin’. However, if this slider is missing (take off the touch slider) then you may need to do

something more than just talk!!!



**"DISCUSSION QUESTION"** *What happens to the other four links when one of the links of the RAM begins to improve and move up?* Ideas: This question highlights the optimism of working on just one area of your relationship during this class. You do not necessarily have to fix everything to make progress... "one good turn deserves (and leads to) another." When the links of the RAM are displayed in mixed and lowered ways you can say to the class: **Some of you have come to this class looking more like this in your relationship... and the specific links that are lower seem to pull the others down and keep you moving in a negative direction—like there is a negative momentum to your relationship. But I want you to know that the opposite is also true—that when you take some positive steps to just improve one of these five areas (ask for one of the links that could move up as a result of this class, like the trust link)—like if you just work on improving your trust, respect and attitude toward each other...then how will that one step of improvement affect the other links?** **Expand. Yes—they will also start to move up and you will generate a positive momentum in your relationship.**



The third principle is that **ENOUGH OF A GOOD THING IS NEVER ENOUGH.** Write in your workbook next to the question under #4: **EVER EXPANDING HORIZON POINTS.**

This means that you never fully reach that completion point in your relationship closeness- portrayed on the RAM, the top is always moving a little farther up—there is always something more to know about your partner; or just when you think you have mastered meeting each other's needs, something happens and you see another way that your partner is there for you. And the sexual relationship is not supposed to become stagnant- it should also grow over the course of your marriage.

One of the reasons that there are ever-expanding horizon points in a relationship is because people change daily, and these changes continue over the course of a lifetime.



**"DISCUSSION QUESTION"** *What are some predictable changes and stages of life that couples face in marriage? How do you imagine that each of these experiences will affect your relationship and the links of the RAM?* Ideas:

There is a question in your workbooks under #3 that I want us to think about. *What are some of the predictable changes and stages of life that couples*

*face in marriage?* I will paraphrase it: **What are some of the NORMAL changes that happen in the course of marriage that result in imbalancing or lowering one or more areas of the RAM? BE SURE TO EMPHASIZE NORMAL—YOU DO NOT WANT SERIOUS ISSUES OR BETRAYALS TO BE ADDRESSED AT THIS POINT IN THE COURSE.** Often the first idea that couples bring up is children.

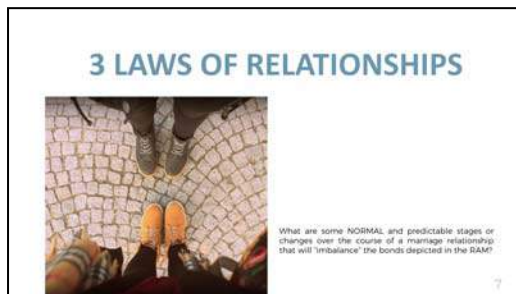
**ASK IF SOMEONE WHO HAS KIDS WOULD COME UP AND SHOW HOW THEIR RELATIONSHIP WAS AFFECTED BY THE BIRTH OF A CHILD.**

Have fun with this and be accepting of the ways that individuals or couples portray their relationship on the RAM. Sometimes an individual will portray something in an extreme way (like lowering commitment to the bottom) and you may want to acknowledge that this can happen but for others it actually stays strong. So then you can turn the RAM slider crooked in order to represent that a situation can make an area of the relationship vulnerable.

You are helping the class participants to think about very abstract concepts of their relationship in easy-to-understand and portray ways. They are becoming familiar with the RAM and, within just 15-20 minutes of the first session, they are describing experiences in their relationship with the RAM.

After the first volunteer, ask for another or ask what another NORMAL change or event can significantly alter the levels of the RAM in your relationship. Other changes or experiences you may want to ask someone to come and portray on the RAM would include: military deployments; empty nest; job changes; etc. **MILITARY: Have another individual come up and show the class what deployment does to a relationship. Have them explain each of the shifts in the RAM.**

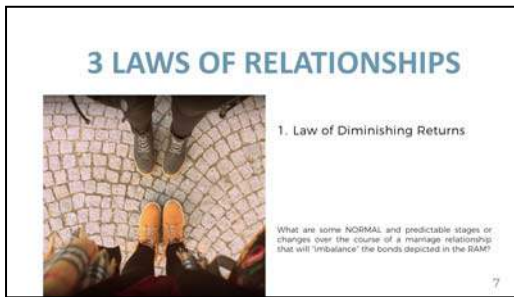
*If you are working with couples just after a deployment then you can state that this picture of the RAM provides an AGENDA for what needs to be strengthened (and for attending this class). In a similar way, if couples are preparing for a deployment then the ways someone had moved the dynamics of the RAM provide a picture of the changes in a relationship that deployed couples need to manage.*



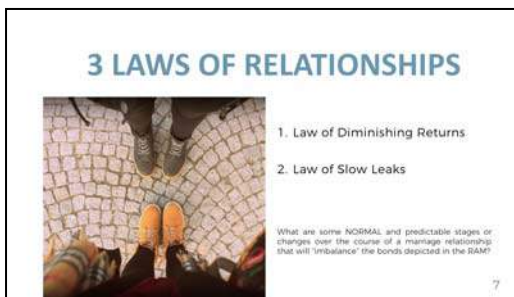
**These changes result in new perspectives, needs, and desires. As a result, a relationship must adapt with these changes. Think about someone going through midlife changes. There will be new needs that emerge during that time. Or consider what happens**

**when a couple faces the new stage of life when they have an empty nest. These life stages and personal changes necessitate adjustments to your roles, needs,**

time together and other aspects of your relationship.

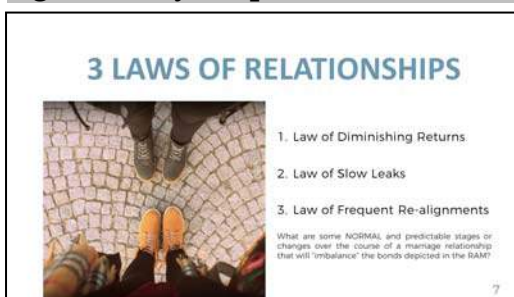


I have three principles that I want you to write down under question #3 or #4 in your workbook: **PRINCIPLE 1: IT IS NORMAL TO BECOME IMBALANCED!** There is no way to go through the years of marriage and not become imbalanced. There is a tag line to a commercial that says: life comes at you fast—and it is true that when you least expect it, something throws you out of balance. This is **NORMAL!**



Now write this down: **PRINCIPLE 2: THE DANGER IS NOT THAT YOU BECOME IMBALANCED, BUT THAT YOU STAY IMBALANCED!** It is normal that something happens in your life to throw these five areas out of balance with each other, or to cause one or more to

significantly drop. **SLOW LEAKS LEAD TO BIG BLOWOUTS!**



Now write this down: **PRINCIPLE 3: THE KEY TO SUCCESS IN MARRIAGE IS TO REGULARLY BALANCE YOUR IMBALANCES.**

These three principles are the foundations of this course. And they resurface in almost every session.



The fourth principle of the RAM is you can **NEVER STOP GIVING AND GROWING** because these five dynamics have diminishing returns. This means that whatever helps your marriage to be strong *today* will probably not continue to have the same benefits *tomorrow*. Some say “marriage takes work.” But I

say that every day offers new opportunities to grow to know your partner better, or trust deeper, etc. Because you and your partner keep changing and these changes create more opportunities for your relationship to grow, if you do not take advantage of them then your relationship diminishes. This is the idea behind the principle that the five links of the RAM have ever extending horizon points so that you need to keep growing in how you know each other,

**believe and trust each other, meet each others' needs, deepen your commitment and physical/sexual relationship.**

You can further explain this by asking the class for examples of things that they did that worked great for a while in their relationship, but tended to need to be revised as time passed. This is different than marital or family traditions that accumulate more meaning as the years increase. For instance, going out on Friday to some dinner and a movie may be a great change of pace and make you feel closer and refreshed. But doing this every Friday night begins to grow old. This phenomenon of diminishing returns happens in most relationship activities if they are not continually attended to and creatively altered over time.



**"DISCUSSION QUESTION"** *Why is it so important for both partners to have a "growth-oriented" attitude toward their relationship?* *Ideas:* The point to emphasize is that a strong marriage requires that both partners be willing over the years to adjust and change to meet their partner's needs. This means that a "growth-orientation" requires two partners who have an attitude of willingness and openness to grow and change in response to each other. Stubborn, proud and resistant partners usually restrict the growth and potential of a marriage relationship.



The fifth and final principle of the RAM is that there is a natural safe zone that you want to honor in your marriage relationship. The RAM provides a **PICTURE OF A HEALTHY RELATIONSHIP.** THIS PROVIDES A PICTURE OF WHAT YOU ARE MANAGING WHEN WE SAY YOU ARE

**RELATIONSHIP MANAGERS... YOU ARE MANAGING THE CLOSENESS IN YOUR MARRIAGE (represented in the RAM).** When you are in this zone you have a feeling of security. This zone is maintained by all levels being fairly strong. However, it is unrealistic for any of us to always be peaking at the top of each level...each of you are in a different stage of life or facing a unique challenge which affects the levels of each of the links. As said earlier, it is normal to become imbalanced.

**Our goal is to help you feel that you have a clear picture of where you are, and what you would like to improve in order to keep your relationship growing over the course of time. In other words, we want you to know how to regularly balance your imbalances!**



**"DISCUSSION QUESTION"** *Discuss your stage of life and any particular changes or challenges that you are presently experiencing. Adjust the levels of the RAM to represent your relationship at this time?*

**ACTIVITY:** In your small groups I would like each partner to take a miniRAM and plot your relationship (you must be respectful and KIND). Then show it to your partner and see how similar or different the profiles are. You should use this to set goals for what you want out of this class and what areas of the RAM you would like to see grow in their relationship. **ONLY GIVE COUPLES 30-60 seconds!** This is applying the following question:



**"DISCUSSION QUESTION"** *What are the specific bonds that you would like to improve in your relationship and what are some general ways you would like to see them grow?* *Ideas:* Keeping a marital relationship fresh takes time and effort, however it is completely doable. For example, couples could agree that they are lacking closeness in their togetherness and how they meet each others needs; and then discuss activities that each would like to do together.

## B. The Formula for "Knowing" 15 minutes



There is a basic formula that you should apply in your marriage for keeping up with knowing each other: These are three T's- None of them are "trust" seeing that this is the second dynamic of the RAM and considered separate from the dynamic of KNOW. What do you think would be one of the

three T's- something you do to get to know each other or stay in touch with each other? The class will quickly come up with talk. You may have to prompt them to say togetherness and time, but often they identify these components on their own fairly quickly.

Or you can ask the class: **What is needed to keep a couple feeling like they really know each other.** If they say, "communication" then ask: **Is this enough? In other words, if you just talk is that enough to feel like you deeply know each other?** Draw out of the class the three T's before you show the power point outline.

**Togetherness and time will be dealt with in Session Three when we look at the ways to meet each other's needs in a marriage and how that builds a bond of reliance. However, in this first session we will focus in on the importance of good communication in the maintenance of intimacy.**

## C. Talk Time

 40 minutes



**Talk time:** Most couples have specific times in their schedule or specific activities where they talk with each other and catch up on what is happening in their lives.

**When do you find in your marriage that you have a regular “talk time?”**

Collect ideas from the class of when they talk together- eg driving the car; taking a walk; after the kids go to bed; etc. You can also point out that sometimes a life change alters the routine talk time and if a couple does not intentionally adjust this loss then they have the risk of losing this valuable and necessary time together. This is another reason why a regular “huddle” to look at the balance of the relationship activities and bonds is so vital.

Ask diads (couples) to talk together just with each other the following question. If your class has spouses without partners present then these small group discussions can be done within the table groups.



**“DISCUSSION QUESTION”** *What are some ways you can improve your good talk times (tv and devices turned off, schedule routine talk times by setting specific times like early morning, evening or during a meal, “no interruption” rules for kids)?*

**COMMUNICATION 101:** There are three components of communication



that, for the most part are universally accepted. They are referred to by different names, but regardless, they are the same concepts.

After the power point portrays the COM and the discussion question, explain each of the three components of communication with the discussion question. The three

initials spell COM so that they are easy to remember. They should all be on the screen from the power point as you explain them.



**“DISCUSSION QUESTION”** *What are common difficulties with content (hot-button topics); other (listening); messenger (how something is said)? Ideas:* Ask this question as you move through each of the three aspects of communication (COM). Here is an example of how to do that:

First, the content of the message is represented by the “C” in our diagram. This refers to both the words spoken AND the nonverbal message (body language). I like to think of this as to what you would catch on film if you had a video camera filming your communication. The camera would catch both the words and the behaviors, but it would not record the “motives” or the “interpretations”- these are more in the thoughts and hearts of the two communicators and are only *implied* by the words and behaviors.

The second component of communication is the other person, represented by the “O” (listener) and the third component is the messenger represented by the “M” (talker). Within these two components are the motives and perspectives of both the one speaking and the other person listening.

The key to healthy communication is found in the balance between these three components. Typically, destructive or hurtful communication patterns occur in one of these three areas (or a combination).

**Content** What are examples of difficulties some have with the content of what is talked about in a relationship, like what are some “hot-button” topics? Uncomfortable with opening up; lack of significant and personal sharing; talk in the marriage like in a business; avoidance of topics that have become overly sensitive; finances; sexual issues; in-laws; etc.

**Other** What are examples of difficulties some have with listening. Impatience; thinking of an answer while the other is talking; lack of concentration; argumentative; lack of eye contact.

**Messenger** What are examples of difficulties some have with talking... like, “It is not WHAT you said, but HOW you said it.” Ideas: Talk too much; talk too little; overbearing; “always” and “never” words; use guilt or shame talk; etc.

Keeping balance between these three components of communication enables you to have healthy communication patterns.



Let’s go a little deeper in the area of Content. There are four levels of openness that should stay in balance in your communication. Let me describe each one briefly. (If you showed the video segment of Dr. John and Dr. Morgan, then you just need to put these four levels of openness (OPEN) on the power point and

then have couples talk about how they do in those four areas of talking and if they have a good balance or need to improve one or more levels.

**O**bservations and facts—this refers to the type of communication where you relay current events, established facts, and things you’ve heard and seen. Like,

“Where did you do today while I was gone?” Or, “I have to take the kids to their swim lessons, and then I will stop at the grocery and pick up something for dinner.”

Perspectives and opinions—this is where you add opinions to your facts. “This rain is driving me crazy.” Or, “I think we are not saving enough money in our budget.”

Experiences and emotions—this goes a bit deeper because you convey your own feelings about more personal experiences. “I was really disappointed when my own supervisor didn’t even comment on the award I received at work.”

Needs and relationship responses—this is the most meaningful depth of communication in your relationship because you express what you are feeling toward your spouse, and what you want and need in the relationship. This is what you might call *your relationship talk*. “I really appreciate that you came out to the garage to help organize this mess. You are always supportive like this to me!” Or, “I feel hurt by you when you tease me in front of our friends.”



**“DISCUSSION QUESTION”** *How deep is your communication?* Ideas:



Couples can talk about how they are doing in these four areas of talking and if they have a good balance or need to improve one or more levels.

After couples have a few minutes to discuss the balance of the depth of their communication, then transition to the second aspect of communication.



how we listen to each other. Both the messenger and the listener need to be aware of their body language. So, let’s do a fun exercise on body language and we will focus on a listener and how they communicate that they understand, and are attentive and respectful.

Communication is more than just the content of what you say... there is also your body language... your non-verbals! What do you think people pay more attention to—what you say or what they see when you talk? The same is true for when you listen... you can repeat what someone says but what they pay the most attention to is your body language. In other words, your actions

**Speak louder than your words!**

**Here is an exercise that illustrates how important your body language is when you say you are listening!** Have two volunteers from the class come to the front and pretend to be partners. One will talk for 30-40 seconds about anything they choose, like something that happened that day or recently, and the other will do everything imaginable (without saying a thing) to convey that he/she is NOT listening. Have fun with this exercise—it should be nonthreatening and an enjoyable activity for class participation. Collect from the class all of the ways that the listener showed poor listening. Write these things on the flip chart.

Afterwards, ask the volunteers to redo what they did, with the speaker continuing to talk about the same things, but the listener will try and show in their body language to the one talking what really good listening looks like. After they do this for another 30 seconds, ask the listener to summarize what the speaker shared. Then have the class identify the characteristics of good listening body language. Summarize with the SOLER acronym.

**EXERCISE: SOLER BODY LANGUAGE**

*Actions speak louder than words!* We have all heard this old saying but too often we have not taken it seriously in our marriages. If we could put a hidden camera in your home, what would you look like when your spouse talks to you... would you have eye contact? Would you be doing other things? Would you stay in the same room or would you be distracted? Your body language conveys more of what is in your heart than your words, and your spouse will probably react more to your body language than what you say. Here is a practical exercise on improving your listening by adjusting your body language.

**S**quare Off: Make sure you are facing your spouse (if at all possible). Have your shoulders square off with your partner’s shoulders.

**O**pen Posture: Try to keep your arms and legs unfolded.

**L**ean toward Your Partner: Periodically lean forward to close the distance between you and your spouse--additional posturing like facial expressions, nods, smiles, etc.

**E**ye Contact: Part of paying attention to someone speaking is to maintain eye contact. Be sure to look at your spouse as he or she talks.

**R**elax: Watch your body to make sure that it stays relax. Nervous habits like looking at your watch, tapping your fingers, or fidgeting tend to convey an impatience with listening.



After going through these examples of difficulties and the exercise on “Body Language-SOLER” then suggest that:

**Listening is not a passive activity. You must put forth effort and thought**

into genuinely hearing what your partner is trying to say to you. This also means that you turn away from other competing distractions- turn down the music, turn off the TV, make good eye contact, turn your body to face your partner. All of these things are part of good listening. The goal of listening is to UNDERSTAND your partner and ultimately know your partner in deeper ways. Even when your partner is saying things that are contrary to what you think, *listen to understand.*



**DISCUSSION QUESTION** *What are the strengths of how your spouse listens to you (empathetic, appreciative, reflective, suggestive)?* Ideas: This question is used as a couples' activity, "I am all EARS" after briefly explaining the "O" in communication... how the Other person listens, their body language and listening skill.

**EXERCISE: SUPPORTIVE COMMUNICATION**

Ask the couples to work in their small groups to do this exercise. Each couple takes turns, speaking to each other and the entire table group. An individual shares one or more of the EARS that is a listening STRENGTH practiced by their partner. You should emphasize that couples **MUST BE POSITIVE**—not **sarcastic or negative**. They should think about each of the following and then say something like this to their partner (and the table group): In our relationship, your strength is to be reflective; you always want to know the details of what happened to me, and I know it is because you care about my day and want to feel a part of it.

- a. Empathetic: Supportive and sympathetic
- b. Appreciative: Appreciate your spouse and his/her experiences
- c. Reflective: Inquire and ask for more
- d. Suggestive: Advice and problem-solving discussions

If you use the video segment of Dr. John and Dr. Morgan, you do not need to explain these six skills, only summarize them. However, below are short explanations of each skill.

**But there are some key skills that are essential for your communication... a skill is just the proficiency with which you engage in some relationship activity. In order to have an OPEN and healthy communication, these six skills need to be regularly sharpened and improved.**



**Skill # 1. Genuine Humility. Developing an attitude of humility is a SKILL and must be an INDIVIDUAL**

partner's pursuit... humility means that you recognize your own shortcomings and give grace to those of your partner. A humble attitude is something you must daily work on. But when both partners daily practice of humility, then they create a flexibility and tolerance in their relationship that helps to soften misunderstandings and disagreements.

Humility is the really the starting point... the essential prerequisite to being able to communicate well as work through a misunderstanding or conflict—*my perspective is not the only perspective.*



**Skill # 2. Respectful Assertiveness.** You need to be able to say what you think—and, of course, that needs to be done in **RESPECTFUL** ways. Partners need to take turns listening to each other's viewpoints... and consider a different way of looking at an issue, or even themselves. Be careful of shutting

down your partner or shutting out their perspective. Mutual assertiveness means that you are being open *to* your partner as well as open *with* your partner!



**SKILL #3. Active Listening.** By **ACTIVE**, we mean that you are not a **PASSIVE** listener, that you are actually **ENGAGING** with what your partner is saying, and working to make your spouse feel understood. So, what does that look like in your marriage relationship?

If you used the video segment, then you can skip the explanation below and just introduce the Active Listening Exercise without going into more detail about what is involved in active listening. Just provide the directions.

Basically, you are listening to **TWO** areas... the **CONTENT** of what your partner is saying, like the **ACTUAL WORDS**; but then you are also listening for the **MEANING & FEELINGS** of the person who is talking. When you are listening to their words **AS WELL AS** to the **FEELINGS** and **MEANINGS** behind what they're saying then you also have the **UNDERSTANDING** to **MIRROR BACK** to them what they are saying and feeling.

When we say **MIRROR** back to them, we are not suggesting that you restate exactly what they said like you are a parrot. Rather, you listen and restate the **MEANING AND FEELINGS** in your own words then you are **REALLY** getting into your partner's world, and making them feel understood.

So the point is this... **DON'T JUST THINK ABOUT AND LISTEN TO**

**THE CONTENT OF WHAT SOMEONE IS SAYING, BUT LISTEN AND THINK ABOUT WHERE THE OTHER PERSON IS COMING FROM, THEIR FEELINGS, THEIR PERSPECTIVE, THEIR BACKGROUND.**

After explaining this third point, ask couples to practice the exercise below with their small groups. One couple should face each other and take a turn practicing the listening skill. You can have each couple do this on their own, or in front of their small group. The other couples in the small group can then provide positive feedback. This approach increases accountability.

**STEP ONE Sharpen Your Skills  20 minutes**

The following activity is geared to help you practice your communication skills, especially your ability to listen and then blend your views with your partner's. In this exercise you will practice the basic components of *active listening*. It is called active because listening is not a passive act.

Every person that talks to someone wants that person to hear what was said. But if the listener just responds by repeating word-for-word what was said, then the speaker wonders if the words are just being mimicked, or if the listener really “got it” - that is, understood the *meaning* of the words and the *feeling(s)* behind them.

Active listening is just that—listening to the words in order to understand the *meaning* that **CONTENT** and the *feelings/meaning* of the **MESSENGER** that are behind the words.

*If you are seated at tables then have each couple take turns practicing this while the others at the table watch. Those observing can provide feedback after each couple practices the active listening exercise. Make sure each member of the couple practice being the listener.*

Face your spouse and take turns being the speaker and listener. The speaker should tell some recent real experience that has happened to him/her. This should be brief (not more than 2 minutes of talking). The listener then will reply with a two-part response:

**a. Identify the feeling of the speaker**

e.g. “You were feeling \_\_\_\_\_;” or, it seems you felt \_\_\_\_\_;” or, “You sure felt \_\_\_\_\_.”

Make sure you use “feeling” words (like, *sad, mad, hurt, frustrated, irritated, unhappy, concerned, betrayed, upset, angry, disappointed*, etc.).

**b. Summarize the experience of the speaker**

e.g. “when \_\_\_\_\_ happened to you.”

It will sound something like:

Listener: “It sounds like you felt frustrated when you did not receive the check in the mail today.”

Or, “I can really understand how hurt you were when you didn’t get any credit for the work you did.”

The two-part response, then, is as follows: “You felt \_\_\_\_\_ when \_\_\_\_\_.”

When done accurately, the speaker often is prompted to share more. Practice this several times in pairs. Take turns being the speaker and listener. The speaker should let the listener know if the feeling and summary that the listener identified was an accurate portrayal of both the meaning and the feelings behind the words.

**So, Active listening is vital to open communication, to truly knowing your partner, their perspective and feelings.**



**The 4<sup>th</sup> skill is Mutual Affirmation—this is the fourth skill necessary for effective communication and especially for resolving misunderstandings and conflicts. This is not just tolerance or passive listening, but truly looking for the “good points” a partner has in their perspective or**

**postition.**

**Couples who have difficulties with resolving their disagreements almost always do NOT affirm the good point(s) of their partner. If you would ask one partner, try to explain the good point your partner is making. They would state it in a short sentence... but this is after ten minutes of explaining their own views and “good points”. I would say, you sounded like a *defense attorney building a case* when you argued your own point.**

**So, take a minute and think of your partner’s good points, and try to become YOUR PARTNER’S ATTORNEY and argue his/her case with just as much feeling and conviction, and with just as many words... in other words, elaborate your *partners good point(s)* just as long as you have been elaborating your own.**

**Most couple who have never done this found that when they tried it, their partner felt amazingly affirmed and understood, their defensiveness**



**melted, and their willingness to work out the disagreement increased dramatically. And when BOTH partners did this, they no longer had a problem working through their conflicts.**

**Skill #5. Meaningful Apologies. Sooner or later, you will need to say, *I am***

sorry. So, it is vital that you develop the ability to say you are sorry in ways that are *truly* meaningful for your spouse. And, by the way, don't think that the ONLY time you need to apologize is when you are WRONG... you may also need to apologize when you COME ACROSS in a hurtful or insensitive way. This is because there are many times that the way you "COME ACROSS" is way different from what you meant, or how you THOUGHT you came across.

So you can explain your intentions and that may help sometimes, but often your ability to take some responsibility for how you came across to your spouse will really help dissolve a misunderstanding. Therefore, apologies should be shared when you said or did something you know was hurtful or wrong. But they can also be shared when you realize or are told that something you said or did came across in a hurtful way, even though you did not mean anything hurtful by your actions or words.



The last skill, skill #6 is Forgiving Closure. Forgiveness is a really important concept and skill and we are going to cover it more deeply in another session. But let me just say this...there are some who just ruminate too long, and even after receiving an apology they will say, "Yea... but you just really hurt me when

you..." So, within a reasonable amount of time, meaningful apologies need to be met with a willingness to forgive and move on.

Before concluding this session explain: As we said, this study really has ONE PRIMARY TAKE-AWAY. It is called Huddles and is a simple but comprehensive way for you to regularly re-align the major areas of your relationship. Read the following from the workbook.

## Huddles

It is important to realize that your relationship will not run itself—it must be run by you. So, on a regular schedule (e.g. weekly or monthly) you and your partner should have a meeting to look at your relationship and see how you are doing in the five dynamic bonds described in the RAM. We will call this your HUDDLE. You can use your own calendar or the one provided in this session.

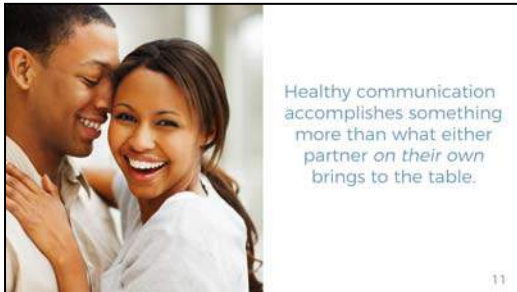
In the first two steps during each huddle (KNOW: Catch Up and TRUST: Patch Up), you will look back on your relationship to see how you have been doing. And in the last three steps (RELY: Dream Up, COMMIT: Back Up, and TOUCH: Build Up) you will look forward so that you can make the necessary adjustments and additions to the upcoming week(s).

Here are some basic guidelines:

1. Be consistent—pick a date (weekly or bi-weekly) for your huddle and set your alerts!
2. Expect to have some unmet needs in you and your spouse—remember strong relationships requires regular realignments!
3. Stay brief & positive—Huddles are a management meeting of your relationship, 20-30 minutes. Set dates on your calendar to address longer topics or issues identified in your huddle.
4. Use the RAM to describe your relationship bonds and structure your huddles.

If you MANAGE YOUR RELATIONSHIP then you can make sure that any SLOW LEAKS will be addressed and together, you will set goals to strengthen and “re-inflate” those areas.

Communication is needed for you to manage your relationship, and to



achieve a major goal of marriage: two becoming one. But it requires both partners to practice good speaking and listening skills. We will look into the ways that this is accomplished throughout the five sessions. However, it is initially accomplished by your

communication... Communication is the means to this end. *Healthy communication accomplishes something more than what either partner on their own brings to the table of marriage.*

**REMEMBER: Healthy communication accomplishes something more than what either partner *on their own* brings to the table!**



**“DEEP THOUGHT”** *“You can never be happily married to another until you get a divorce from yourself. Successful marriage demands a certain death to self.”* Jerry McCant

## Couple LINKS

(MONTH)

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat

**CATCH UP:** KNOW  
**PATCH UP:** TRUST  
**DREAM UP:** RELY  
**BACK UP:** COMMIT  
**BUILD UP:** TOUCH

**TOP TEN LIST**

- Romance
- Affection & Nurturing
- Mental Stimulation
- Social Activities
- Projects & Tasks
- Openness in Communication
- Unstructured Time Together
- Spiritual Activities & Closeness
- Entertainment & Recreation
- Sexual Relationship

**TALK TIMES**

**ATTITUDE ADJUSTMENTS & APPRECIATIONS**

**SHORT-TERM GOALS**

## INSTRUCTOR EVALUATION FORM FOR SESSION ONE

Rate your accomplishment of the lesson goals on a 1 to 5 scale.

- 1 Not taught**
- 2 Very difficult to teach this point**
- 3 Somewhat difficult to teach this point**
- 4 Somewhat easy to teach this point**
- 5 Very easy to teach this point**

### Goals

- Learn the RAM and how it helps to visualize the bonds of closeness and intimacy in your relationship.
- Cultivate a belief in couples being RELATIONSHIP MANAGERS who put continued effort in building and *running* the closeness and intimacy in marriage.
- Develop an understanding of what makes a relationship safe and how a relationship develops vulnerabilities. Understand the natural “drops” in the RAM and how they can affect your marital relationship.
- Learn the formula for maintaining the “knowing-each-other” in your relationship
- Understand the components of communication and how to practice healthy patterns of talking together and avoid destructive communication patterns.

**Lesson-At-a-Glance**    Total Class Time \_\_\_\_\_

<b>Section</b>	<b>Suggested Time</b>	<b>Actual Time</b>
1. Five Principles of the RAM	45 minutes	_____
2. Formula for “Knowing”	15 minutes	_____
3. Talk Time	40 minutes	_____
Step One: Catch Up (KNOW)	20 minutes	_____

## OVERVIEW OF SESSION TWO

In this session trust, the second love link in your relationship is examined. Trust is explained as the confidence you feel based on the opinion/attitude you hold of your partner. This opinion or attitude comes from what you know of your partner and the lenses (or trust pictures) you look through. This becomes the source for what you expect of your partner. This session will explore how to cultivate healthy attitudes in your relationship, the importance of regularly expressing your appreciation of each other, a healthy conflict management style, and ways to facilitate forgiveness and repair trust when it has been broken.

### Goals

1. Understand the dynamic bond of trust (versus trustworthiness).
2. Learn what “keeping a good attitude” fully involves.
3. Learn the ways that a trust-picture can slowly become distorted and resentments can set in.
4. Develop practical plans of reframing and solution-oriented approaches for changing bad attitudes to respectful attitudes.
5. Develop rules for how to successfully handle conflicts.
6. Appreciate the extent of emotional responses when a partner finds out that his/her spouse seriously broke his/her trust.
7. Gain a relative timeframe and understanding for the overlapping stages of the reactions to a breakdown of trust.
8. Differentiate between the process of forgiving and the process of rebuilding trust.
9. Learn the second step of a huddle: affirming and appreciating your spouse while regularly taking inventory of your attitude of trust and respect.

### Lesson-At-a-Glance

A. Your Actions Are Important, But So Is Your Attitude	20 minutes
B. How You Become Resentful	10 minutes
C. Replacing Resentments With Respect	10 minutes
D. Conflict Resolution Plans	35 minutes
E. Healing The Hurts of Disappointments and Broken Trust	40 minutes
STEP TWO Refresh Your Attitude	05 minutes

### Material Checklist

Use the Relationship Attachment Model® (RAM) display board. This hands-on teaching tool represents the core of this curriculum and is an excellent visual aid. You must use the LINKS workbooks (several versions available for ordering through [www.nojerks.com](http://www.nojerks.com)). Each workbook comes with a mini-RAM. It is beneficial to have one workbook per individual in the class. You will also need to have a power point projector, screen dry erase board or a paper (preferably) to write additional notes. The paper notes can be taped on the walls to provide further visual aids to the accumulating material. The lesson plans provide the outline and structure for each session and are printed throughout the lesson plans which match the LINKS participant workbooks.

## SESSION TWO RESPECTFULLY CULTIVATING TRUST



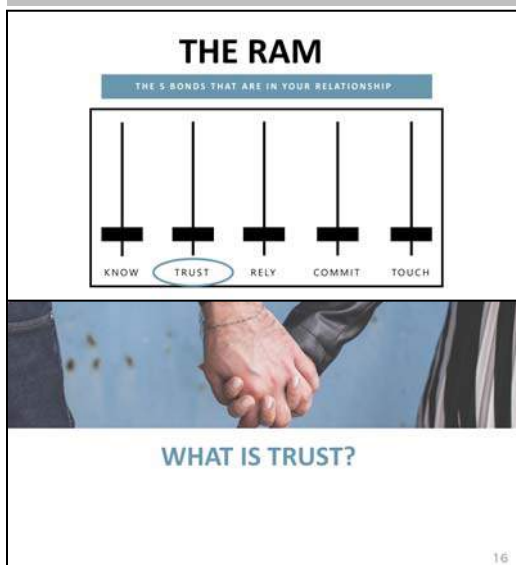
This slide will remain on the screen as participants enter the room. Remember to have them sit relatively close or at tables if you do not have assigned sitting- this helps with the cohesion of the group and encourages group discussion when you ask questions.



Briefly review the three laws for running your relationship... the law of diminishing returns states that life will deflate relationship bonds represented in the RAM. This includes both the bad and the good in life. It is normal for relationships to fluctuate and become

“imbalanced” meaning that one of more bonds of a relationship will deflate on a regular basis. The second law, slow leaks, says that when an area of a relationship (bond) is lowered and one or both people in the relationship feel some distance from that deflated area, then it becomes a slow leak that creates potential vulnerabilities in the relationship. This is how a slow leak can eventually lead to a flattened relationship, or to a big blowout. The third law is the main take-away of the course—to make frequent re-alignments. This means that it is important to frequently identify the areas of a relationship that have deficits (the bonds of the RAM that have deflated) and then set

some goals to increase that area or bond in the relationship.



We spent Session One looking at the RAM, these three laws, and then focused in on the “know” on the RAM. This session we are going to look at the

“trust” dynamic bond of the RAM.

Ask the class for large group discussion,



“DISCUSSION QUESTION”

*What is trust?* Ideas: Collect answers on

the board. Usually, the class will mix together the concepts of “trust”-- “trustworthy” —and “reliance”. Go ahead and write their ideas on the board and put all of the words/ideas representing “trustworthy” on a right column and all of the words/ideas that represent the “act of trust” on a left column (words like belief, confidence, faith). You do not need to point out these two columns until you have collected the ideas. Then explain to the class that **we usually think of two primary concepts when we think about the word, “trust” — the first is being trustworthy or dependable** (write trustworthy at the top of the right column). **The second concept is the act of trust which includes putting your belief or faith in someone; having a confidence in someone; feeling safe with someone.** The first part of this session will deal with the attitude of trust and later we will address some of the issues of being trustworthy and what to do if your partner has acted untrustworthy.

In order to know where you are heading with the definition of trust, at that time you will point out that trust has a “feeling” side and a “mental” side...that it is a *feeling* of confidence that results from your *mental* opinion of someone. You may also differentiate between trust and reliance with trust being the *belief you have in another* and reliance being defined as the *actions of trust* or the ways that you act on your trust to depend on someone for something. You may need to acknowledge that there are so many ways that trust is used that it becomes confusing but for this session we are going to make trust the confidence you have in your partner based on the mental picture or opinion you hold of your partner (the partner in your head) and reliance will be used to refer to the ways that you depend on your partner to be there for you, meet specific needs and fulfill your expectations (which come out of your trust picture).

## A. Your Actions Are Important, But So Is Your Attitude



The following questions direct the class to focus on the importance of the attitude one partner has toward the other. In sections A-C you will stay focused on the fact that each person is responsible for his/her own attitude toward their partner—DO NOT let the class turn the focus of responsibility onto the partner during these sections—section D will change the focus to be on both partners working together and the fact that we are all responsible to do our best to help our partner have a good attitude. But keep the emphasis on your own individual responsibility to keep a good attitude toward your partner until you get to section D.

**Trust is a frequently used term that is difficult for many to define. It is common to refer to the person you are closest with as the person “you trust the**

most;" or, "my most-trusted friend." Trust is always expected in a marriage relationship. In fact, you would think that your spouse is someone you would trust more than anyone else.



Then explain: I am going to provide you with a slightly different definition of trust. Trust is *the positive belief you have in your partner...it is the feeling of confidence you have from your opinion or attitude of your partner.* Trust is a confidence that comes from your opinion

toward your spouse. This opinion is what we often refer to as your attitude.



Transition from "trust" to attitude by asking the next series of questions. Use the questions to guide the class discussion. There are several questions in your workbook about your attitude I would like to ask you:



**"DISCUSSION QUESTION" *Why***

***is your attitude so important in your marriage?*** *Ideas:* This is a good question to get the discussion started on keeping a good attitude. As stated, the first half of this session (A-C) should stay focused on being responsible for your attitude toward your partner. You want to lead the participants to realize that they do not just live with a partner in their home... but also with the partner in their head.

Expand this topic by asking these additional questions. **How many of you have ever gotten into a bad attitude toward your partner? How quickly can you get into a bad attitude toward your partner? If I was to separate you from your partner so that husbands were in one room and wives in the other, and I told the wives: I will give \$1,000 to anyone who can call your husband and in 10 seconds or less, throw them into a bad attitude... who would take me up on this offer?**

So attitudes can change quickly and getting into a bad attitude is common, right? Remember the principles from Session One: It is normal to become imbalanced... well we could say, "It is normal to get into a bad attitude." But what is dangerous is not "getting" into a bad attitude, but "staying" in a bad attitude. So the key question might be: *How good are you at quickly getting out of a bad attitude?*

Let's have a little fun. There is a question under How You Become Resentful, #1 that I want us to answer.



**"DISCUSSION**

**QUESTION"** *What in your marriage is like the proverbial pebble in the shoe? In other words, what are some of your pet peeves-little things that irritate you about your partner?* I want you to tell on

each other...AND to confess some of your little irritants. So what are your LITTLE pet peeves in your marriage... those little things that can instantly put you in a bad attitude? Make sure to keep it light-hearted and that only SMALL irritants are to be shared... and nothing that would embarrass your partner.

Write these on the flip chart and you can use them later in this session when you teach the steps of apologizing. Allow the couples to banter with each other but avoid any examples of serious issues. **Ask the next question.**



**"DISCUSSION QUESTION"** *Who is responsible for your attitude toward your partner?* Use this question to reinforce the need for each partner to



own the responsibility of their attitude toward their spouse. The class will tend to quickly acknowledge that "I am responsible for my attitude toward my partner" so you will want to drive this home. I would like each of you to stand and look at your partner and repeat, "I am responsible for my attitude toward

\_\_\_\_\_ (name). But then you can tease the class, You all looked so sincere but if you had been in a court of law you would have all committed perjury. Because I know that when one of your pet peeves (you can point to one on the list) occurs then you do NOT say to yourself, "I am responsible for my attitude." Rather you say, "if you would not do \_\_\_\_\_ the I would not get in a bad attitude!"

The following two questions are asking, "What exactly happens when we get into a bad attitude." Read the next two questions.



**"DISCUSSION QUESTION"** *When you have a bad attitude toward your partner, what actually changed in your thinking about your partner. And why can your attitude change back and forth so quickly?*

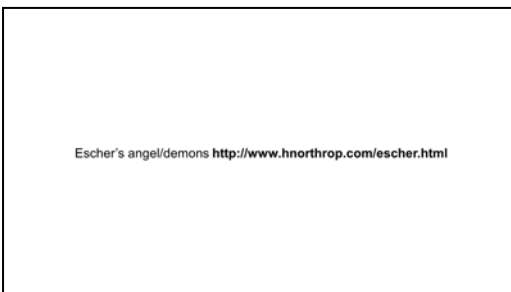
In order to better answer these questions, let me show you a couple of pictures.



Perceptual shifts (Perceptual Psychology) is a theory that describes this phenomenon that occurs in relationships. There are a few famous pictures that illustrate these shifts. You can type these addresses into your browser to find these two examples of perceptual shifts. The first is the old/young woman <http://www.word-sculptures.com/illusions.htm>

Is there anyone in the class who only sees one woman in the picture—you should be able to see a young and an old woman. Have the person who can only see one explain which one they see, and

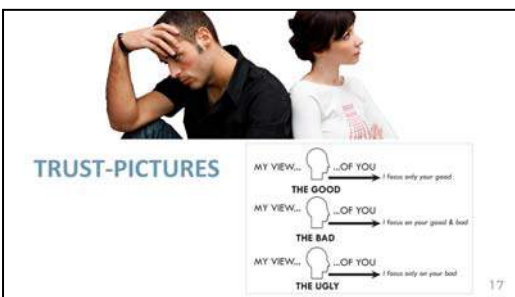
then: ask for a volunteer to help them see the other woman. Where do you look in order to see each woman? Let the class discover as you help the one who had difficulty seeing both that: What makes one or the other come to the forefront is WHERE YOU FOCUS. Ask them to write down in their workbooks: WHAT I FOCUS ON CHANGES THE PARTNER I SEE (IN MY MIND).



Have the class look at Escher's angel/demons and say the first thing they see. Make the same points about how our attitude is determined by what specific characteristics we focus on about our partner.

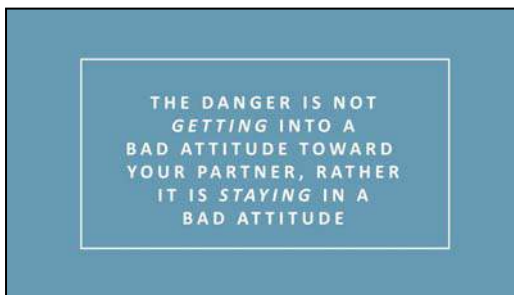
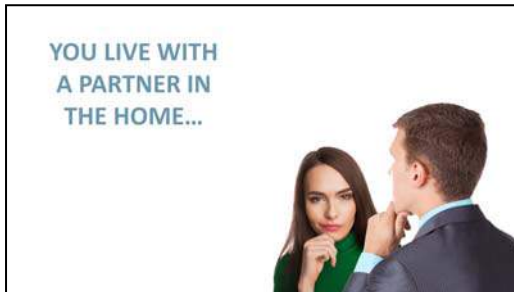
<http://www.hnorthrop.com/escher.html>

Use the diagram on the power point of the three lenses to illustrate the way that a trust-picture can pull you toward a partner or push you away from a partner. The point of this slide is that you can



focus on the positive characteristics of your partner in a way to bring out his or her best (I am so appreciative that you are helping me with this project!). Or you can always be thinking of the negatives along with the positives so that you have a mixed view with somewhat mixed feelings toward your partner (e.g. I am really happy that you are helping me with this project, but I just wish that you would

help more often). Then the “ugly” trust-picture discounts the positives and brings the negatives to the forefront (The only reason you are helping with this project is because it is something you want, not really to help me... you never just help me).



Write this down in your workbook under what is trust... YOU LIVE WITH A PARTNER IN YOUR HOME; AND A PARTNER IN YOUR HEAD. Which one do you think influences you the most? This dynamic trust-picture tells you what your partner is doing when you are not around. For example, if I said that your partner was extremely mad at you. Could you imagine what your partner would look like? Give a few moments for the class to think.

Of course, you can, because you have a picture in your head that takes what you know about your partner and plays it out in the specific situation. And just like the picture of the angels and demons, the picture you have in your head of your partner can change dramatically when your focus shifts!

Sometimes, you even have a conversation with the partner in your head. And some of you talk more to the

partner in your head then the partner in your home! Have some fun with the class as they think about times that they have done this—this will also make sure that they understand the concept.

## B. How You Become Resentful

20 minutes



**BREAK OUT ACTIVITY:** Divide the class into TWO GROUPS and assign one group to brainstorm everything involved with a couple moving from just a bad attitude to a deep resentment (e.g. the steps a couple would take to sink into deep resentments toward each other). The second group

would brainstorm the steps a resentful couple would take to get back to a good attitude toward each other. Each group would write their findings on a flip chart. After the first group presents their steps to resentment, you would review B. (below). And after the second group presents then review C. (below).

*It works best to have the Road To Resentment group make their presentation, and then you go through the three points on How You Become Resentful. Then have the second group present their findings on The Road Back to Respect. After they are finished, you can go through the three points on How to Replace Resentments with Respect. The more detailed the two group presentations, then the less info and detail you need to give when you review the three categories under B and C. Just make sure to tie in the workbook points with the class presentations. A detailed description of these two slides is below... but with the class presentations, you do not need to repeat the details each group identified, just tie the three points from the power point in with their findings.*

An alternative if you have limited time is to just go through the slides and lead class discussion with some of the workbook questions.

**So... relationships are both *between* and *within*. You have a marriage (or relationship) BETWEEN you and your partner and a marriage WITHIN your head/mind. And BOTH are important. Your trust or belief in your partner is threatened every time you allow a bad attitude to go unchecked. Eventually, you will develop a more negative “trust picture” and you will view your partner with less positives, lowered feelings of respect and confidence... and this is one major way your trust level (point to the RAM) can go down. You could call this the “slow leak” in many marriages. Even though the issues are minor, when they add up they become major (*many minor issues add up to become a major source of disrespect*).**

**One way to better understand the important role your attitude (or what we have called your trust-picture) plays in your marriage is to look at the how you become resentful- there is a *developmental course* that occurs when you move from just a bad attitude into a deep resentment. In other words, there are several steps that lead you from just a bad attitude to a deep resentment. Understanding these steps will help you to see that resentments do not “JUST HAPPEN”—nor is it your partner’s fault. There may be something that your partner does that irritates you, but it is what you do with it that either dismisses the irritant or leads you into resentment!!**

If using the two groups, assign the class in the two groups and provide them with the directions:

**Group One will write on the top of their flip chart: The Road to**

Resentment. Imagine that you are teaching a class on “the way to become bitterly resentful in a marriage.” You want to emphasize what individual partners can do, rather than what couples do together. In other words, if ONE partner wanted to become really resentful, what would that partner do... how would that partner think... and what would be the progression or steps that partner would take to move from just a “bad attitude” to a bitter resentment?

Group Two will write on the top of their flip chart: The Road Back to Respect. Imagine you have a classroom of very bitter and resentful people who you want to help know how to move past their resentment and come back to a loving and respectful attitude toward their partner. And, like Group One, you too will want to emphasize more of what an individual can think and do, rather than what a couple can do together in their relationship. Both groups can have some couple interaction suggestions, but try and stay focused primarily on the individual partner’s responsibilities.



**“DISCUSSION QUESTION”** *What in your marriage is like the proverbial pebble in the shoe? In other words, what are some of your pet peeves—little things that irritate you about your partner?* Ideas: You already answered this question above.

So, what do you think? How does it all begin? What would be the first step toward a deep resentment? What would someone do to grow in a resentment toward their spouse? *Continue to collect ideas then you can use the power point as a summary of what they generated rather than teaching in a power point driven fashion.* Typically, they will come up with many ideas that include specific and sometimes overlapping points. The three “stages” that lead from a “bad attitude” to a “deep resentment” are more general than specific (like a category) so many of the ideas will probably fall under one stage.

The following questions under points two and three in your workbook can help to generate these three ways (or stages) that resentment develops.



**“DISCUSSION QUESTION”** *Describe how you can over-focus on a negative issue with your partner and make a “big deal” out of something that is relatively minor. How does this affect the ways that you interact with the “partner in your head?”* You can bring up examples of talking to your partner in your head when you are driving the car, or walking out of the room irritated with your partner—it may sound like mumbling or you may simply do it silently. But it is the “dynamic” of your attitude... in other words, your attitude often comes out in a mental conversation. We can talk ourselves into

resentment. At one minute you can think of your spouse as absolutely an angel, but a devil the next (referring to the former Escher picture).



**"DISCUSSION QUESTION"** *Will my true partner please stand up! Have you ever had a "bad attitude" toward your partner when all you could see is his or her worst traits? How did this affect your behavior? Your expectations? Your feelings?* **Ideas:** **Will my true partner please stand up!** is a take-off from an old show called "To Tell The Truth." It had three characters who all pretended to be the same person. The contestant could ask number one, two and three different questions in order to try and figure out which one was actually the real person. Every show ended with the question, will the real "name" please stand up. At that point, the three characters would start to stand up and look at each other, building the suspense. Finally, one would stay standing while the other two sat down. In the same way, **you can become confused as to who really is your partner? All I see any more are the worst traits framed in my "ugly" trust-picture? This deep resentful portrayal of your partner will prompt severely negative feelings and change your expectations and even the ways you treat your partner.**

While spouses tend to know each other better than anyone else, there are times in which a mental trust-picture can become so negative that the opinions, feelings and expectations about a spouse become distorted. This is important to recognize because a trust-picture, when stuck in resentments, will cause pessimistic expectations and/or interpretations of a partners' actions. These negative views can become so dominant that you no longer see your partner in perspective. These are the occasions when a spouse may respond with "I knew you would do that" or "I figured you would be late..." A spouse's trust-picture is always subjective (not 100% factual and objective) and it is vital that one takes responsibility to frequently take inventory of what characteristics he/she is focusing on and bringing to the forefront.

Now you can summarize the three stages with the power point slides. Use the brief explanations below with your summaries.



**The first stage how you become resentful is the increase in sensitivity over something- LITTLE THINGS BEGIN TO ADD UP.** Resentments begin small but then, over time, evolve and develop into more serious issues. You can use the analogy of a pebble in the shoe... at first it is just an irritation. **Something**

**about your spouse begins to become like the proverbial pebble in the shoe. It**

begins as a small irritant but then continues to fester, hurting or agitating you more each time it repeats. Even if it is just a small matter, in time it hurts in a big way. When “little things add up” you find yourself recounting all the other times this has happened. No longer is each irritant independent of the past, but now there is a connection between all of them. The present situation is now in a string of past similar occurrences and the present and past is overlapped.



In the next stage, the pebble has not been removed and is now more than just an irritation—it has caused a sore of the foot. In other words, **LITTLE THINGS BECOME BIG THINGS** and these sensitivities begin to rearrange your opinion or trust-picture of your partner. Like characters on a stage, the

good qualities subtly are pushed toward the back and the negative qualities are brought forward. This occurs many times with more significant meanings becoming attached to the irritant. All of a sudden, you find yourself saying, “If you *loved* me you would put your dirty dishes in the sink.” Or, “If you truly *respected* me, you would not tell me how to drive.” These different meanings become the “frame” that is placed around the event. The frame determines the meaning of the event and a more serious and negative frame can completely alter the significance and emotional impact of an irritant.

This second stage is explained by two major theories. The first, cognitive theory, proposes a concept of *framing* which states that the meanings of events are subjective. It is the individual who determines a “frame of reference” that establishes what an event means to that individual. A second but similar concept from attribution theory states that an individual attributes a meaning to some event in order to determine the subjective significance of that event. The importance of understanding these two similar concepts is that if meanings are set by individual perspectives, then individuals can also change that meaning. This is often referred to as *reframing*. You can teach the technique of reframing a pet peeve (irritant) with a more positive frame of reference rather than with the

negative frame. This is referred to in the question under Replacing Resentment #3.



**You may begin to find that you have more than one trust-picture of your partner (remember the good, the bad and the ugly trust-pictures.**

**The final stage occurs when this**

string of irritants and the additional negative meanings have grown to become so dominate that the BIG THINGS ARE ALL YOU CAN SEE...crippling the trust and intimacy in the relationship. Now you have difficulty seeing anything but this most negative picture of your partner. The *good* picture (only seeing positives) and the *bad* picture (mixed positives and negatives) are fairly uncommon now, with the negative picture (the *ugly*) of seeing a partner's negative qualities and having an entrenched negative meaning are all you can see. This "all you can see" negative trust-pictures will generate a radically different set of feelings toward your spouse. Mood and attitude shifts accompany these locked-in negative attitude and belief about your partner. And even if you are able to sometimes feel good about him/her, in a split moment something happens that drops the good lens and brings up the ugly lens. Your feelings toward your partner, along with your expectations and thoughts immediately shifts, as if you are looking at a different person altogether.

### C. Replacing Resentments With Respect 🍏 20 minutes



#### "DISCUSSION QUESTION"

*What are some practical ways that you can change your attitude and stop becoming irritated over the same issues?*

*Ideas:* You can ask this question to the entire class or ask the table groups to

come up with ways that we change attitudes. When you gather the list you will find that most ideas fall under one of two categories: **mental** (change how you think about it) and **behavioral/solution-focused** (change how you live with it).

See if the class mentions anything similar to the idea of "admitting your own shortcomings" (like humility, look in the mirror, put things in perspective, etc.). It is likely that the class will generate many detailed suggestions that you will list on the board. When completed, you can use the following three points

to summarize this section.



**So what are you to do in order to avoid becoming resentful...or to move back to a respectful view of your partner after you have progressed to the point of becoming stuck in resentments?**

**Three steps are suggested. First,**

**HUMBLE YOURSELF AND ADMIT YOUR OWN SHORTCOMINGS.** Couples who are able to approach each other with a measure of humility are much better at keeping the positive qualities of each other in the forefront of their minds, and letting go of the sensitive “stones in the shoe.”

At this point you may want to clarify that we are not dealing with major breaches of trust. That will be covered in the next point. Rather, we are looking at the minor ways that couples can become irritated by the imperfections of their partner (too messy, forgetful, late, anxious, worried, control-freak, irritable, etc) and then over-focused on those negative qualities to the exclusion of the positive.

It is so easy to focus on others’ imperfections, especially your spouse because you know them so well. Therefore it is important to take notice of your own imperfections to serve as a wake up call and remind yourself that you too are not perfect. It is always a challenge to admit your own shortcomings, especially in a spirit of humility. But periodically doing this can set a better mood of approachability and respect.



The next step to cleaning out your trust-picture is to **REMEMBER YOUR PARTNER'S STRENGTHS**. It is a good idea to daily review the strengths of your partner and the ways that your partner adds to your life. Tell your partner daily what you appreciate about him/her. Many times our feelings follow our actions!

Reviewing your partner’s strengths daily will serve as a reminder of all the ways in which your partner contributes to your life and happiness.



The third and last step in refreshing your attitude (or the view you have) of your partner and replacing resentments with respect is to **FOCUS ON WAYS YOUR PARTNER HELPS YOU** (the goal is to unite or fuse you and your partner into something more than either of you are on your own). This means

that the reason you and your partner have differences is to benefit each other, not compete or conflict with each other. Many times, your partner’s strengths match some aspect of your weaknesses. It is a good idea to regularly renew your belief in the goal of marriage that your partner brings different personality qualities and perspectives in order to stretch you beyond the person you would have been just on your own.

This is the story of many marriages: “my marriage relationship has made me something more than I could have ever become on my own.” You were not supposed to marry your image in the mirror. Opposites often attract, and you were drawn to a partner with these strengths AND weaknesses for a reason.

Remember your own imperfections... remember your partner’s strengths... and remember that the goal of marriage is to blend the qualities from your partner and you so that both of you become more than what either of you could have been on your own.

**OPTIONAL ACTIVITY #1:** Assign the following Discussion question from workbook to table groups.



**“DISCUSSION QUESTION”** *Choose one of the irritations that you both agree would be better to change than tolerate. Form a plan on how you can reframe your thinking about the source of this irritation, and/of make positive changes that decrease or remove this irritation.*

You can have the groups at the tables go back to the list of irritations they had discussed earlier and brainstorm ways they have been able to get out of their “bad attitude” when something pushed their buttons. Have each table help one of the couples with some **SMALL** irritant. Then when they have finished with that couple then they can move on to help the next couple at that table (probably there will not be enough time for all couples to do this).

They can come up with solutions in two categories: to change how they live with it (solution-oriented) or change how they think about it (reframing). It helps to explain these two ways before you assign them this exercise. This builds off of the discussion question the groups discussed before this section (Some practical ways to change your attitude...).

I would like each table group to help at least one couple with a **SMALL** irritant that reoccurs in their relationship. I want you to use two techniques: reframing and solution-oriented. Reframing is a technique from cognitive psychology that involves changing the frame of reference, the meaning, the way that you look at something your partner is doing. For instance, a partner could decide to “just live with it” and change his/her mental association. This would involve making a change in what you think about some small irritant, which would actually change how you feel about it.

When you explain what you would like from your partner then make sure you use “I” statements and phrases that are not inflammatory. Review the Assertive Statements activity in the workbook to provide examples of

**assertive statements without attacking.**

**OPTIONAL ACTIVITY #2: ASSERTIVE STATEMENTS**

The following is another exercise that can be used to help couples identify ways to talk with each other about some of the smaller issues that challenge their positive opinions of each other. When an offensive issue keeps repeating then a couple must address it—either to change it or find some ways to accept it with a positive attitude. You can use this exercise to have couples practice approaching each other without contempt or hostility. This can be done in couple dyads (by a couple without their table group listening or participating), or by an entire table group. If at the table, then explain: **Please be sure to first talk with your spouse privately about something you both agree can be shared with your table. Then choose one or more of the sentences below to address this issue. Practice addressing that issue by using one of the sentences below.**

If this is done privately, then a couple can take turns just using the sentences to frame an issue. Warn them to not go off into a long discussion about the issue, but rather to practice stating each of the sentences while the partner listens and then acknowledges that he/she receives/accepts the statement.

If couples do this in front of their table group, then again have each partner in a couple address the same issue with one of the sentences below while the table group listens. When the couple finishes, then the next couple practices framing their issue with one of the sentences in the workbook activity.

**Directions from the Workbook:**

We error in one of two common ways when there is something we want from our partner or want to say to our partner. First, we become too “aggressive,” saying things we later regret or using a tone that is too harsh. The second error is that we are not assertive enough. We try to explain our point of view only to shut down or give up too quickly. Sometimes we don’t even approach our spouses because we feel it won’t do any good or we just don’t like conflict.

The following statements are intended to be loving ways to explain a thought, feeling or desire that could create tension or even conflict. Finish each sentence with something that you would like to see changed in your relationship. Then think of one more beginning sentence that you could use in other situations where you want to approach your partner about something that could potentially create conflict.

What I would like from you in our relationship is

What I could do for you that would help our relationship is

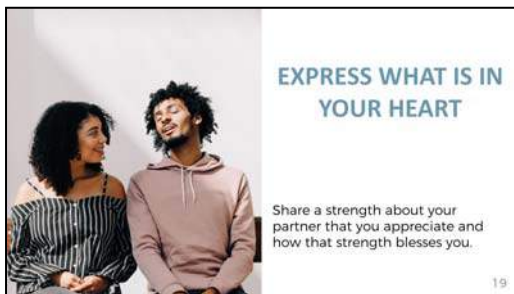
What I would like for you to do more in our relationship is

What I would like for us to do differently is

There is an example Dr. Van Epp gives of a 70-something client who was grieving the loss of her husband. You can use that example in this way: **Dr. Van Epp gave an example in his certification course of a 70-something client who was grieving the loss of her husband. At one point in the counseling she admitted that for decades she had gripped about her husband leaving the newspaper all over the couch in the living room every morning. With tears in her eyes, she said, "I would do anything now to wake up in the morning and come downstairs to newspapers spread over my couch." What had changed was her *association* of that irritating habit of her husband.** If you tell this story you would then conclude with asking the class to come up with some alternative positive ways that this woman could have viewed her husband's bad habit while he was still alive (e.g. he is still alive; he is well-read; I am glad he is so interested in world events; now we have something to talk about; he gets up early in the morning and doesn't bother me... he takes care of himself and a little clean up is a small price to pay for sleeping in when he gets up; etc.). **This may seem trite, but some couples fight for years about one or more of these irritants that then become the most missed thing after one has passed on (e.g. the wife just wishes one time more she would walk into the living room and find the newspaper all over the couch).**

The second technique is a solution-oriented decision where the couple agrees to make some change or adaptation to how they handle their irritation. For instance, the wife could have gotten up with her husband to do the morning together... fix breakfast together and clean up together; they could have maybe agreed upon a place where he reads the paper and makes his small messes (his "man cave"); maybe he would have been open to a short to-do list every morning (1. put paper in magazine rack; 2. put all dishes in dishwasher; 3. wipe off counters).

## **MANDATORY ACTIVITY:** EXPRESSING WHAT IS IN YOUR HEART



*Ask the couples at each table to take turns and one couple at a time turn to face each other and tell each other what some of their partner's strengths are and how those strengths are helpful to them. The remaining couples at the table will watch and then give any positive feedback*

before switching and having the next couple at the table face each other and fulfill the exercise.

**Be sure to KEEP A FOCUS ON YOUR PARTNER’S STRENGTHS and WHAT YOU APPRECIATE ABOUT YOUR PARTNER.**

Remind couples that they are not allowed to even imply something negative about their spouse. They must stay focused on their partner’s strengths and how those strengths benefit or bless them

When the tables are done then ask for those who will share with the entire class something some affirmation or appreciation that was expressed in their group. They would be required to stand, introduce the couple and share what each appreciated. You could also prompt the class to share what non-verbals they saw that expressed love and appreciation when the couples engaged in this activity. This helps the couples to practice the restatement communication from session one while building greater cohesion at the tables. It also allows you to point out that sometimes our actions change our feelings and if you take the step to affirm your partner the acts of love (and feelings) will follow.

**D. Healing the Hurts of Disappointments & Broken Trust**

 **50 minutes**



In the last section of this session, more serious betrayals of trust are addressed. This is a sensitive topic and you should reassure the couples that you understand that this is a complicated and emotional process. You can introduce it in this way:

**In this second section we are going to consider more serious breakdowns of trust. However, before we do and as a way of transitioning from**

<b>1. taking responsibility</b>	-----	<b>2. rebuilding trust after a</b>
<b>for your own attitude</b>	<b>(disagreements)</b>	<b>major breakdown</b>

**There are many times *in between* these two extremes that you need to talk about a misunderstanding, conflict, difference of opinion, disagreement, or a topic that is simply more emotional. The practice of positively and respectfully talking through minor disappointments and conflicts will help you to develop the skills needed to work through more serious conflicts and breakdowns of trust! So, before we address some important points about rebuilding trust, let’s take a couple of minutes and talk about ways you can talk through disagreements.**

**So what are is one EXTREME way that couples handle disagreements?** Almost always the class will state either an overly aggressive or



avoidant style. Use that extreme and then ask for additional ideas in that particular category. When you have written a number of them on the board, then ask the class what would be the EXTREME opposite of this category. You will end up listing examples in that category. These

two extremes can be portrayed on a continuum:

too aggressive-----too passive  
 assertive AND affirming

There are also combinations of these three broad categories... some are passive-aggressive; some are assertive but never affirming; some are affirming but never assertive; some are “bottle-up” (passive) and then “blow-up” (aggressive). But after the class generates discussion on the two extremes...

1. Attacking
2. Avoiding

Explain the third: **3. Assertive Affirmers are supportive, compromising yet assertive. They work hard to see the perspective of their partner. Certainly, the best style is the assertive & affirming management of conflict. Affirming refers to the acknowledgement of your partner’s point(s) in genuine, validating, and respectful ways. It is important to become skilled in resolving conflicts in the most positive way: an assertive, validating and empathic style.**



**ACTIVITY: CONFLICT MANAGEMENT PORTRAITS**

You can make this a competition—that often gets the tables working harder. However, when they are done and have presented their “CONFLICT RESOLUTION PORTRAITS” then you

can have them vote. Often a table will vote only for their own picture. If that is the case then you can tease them that they actually all lost because the #1 rule in conflict management is to NOT compete with each other.

**STEP ONE...**You can ask the tables to come up with a description of what healthy conflict management looks like. **I would each of the tables to come up with a list of the rules for healthy conflict management. By this I mean, what “rules” or “steps” should couples follow so that conflicts are handled in respectful, affirming and yet assertive ways.**

Making the table-groups come up with this list is better than you trying to teach them some list of rules or steps. If you do not have time to do step two then

ask for the table who thinks they have the longest and most thorough list? Review that list (and maybe hang it on the wall) and then ask a second table to circle on their lists any additional rules not mentioned and then present their list to the class (have that list hung on the wall as well). Continue to do this with each group until all have shared.

But if you have time then instruct the class that after they complete their list of rules or steps then they are to do step two.

**STEP TWO...** After they have generated their list, each table could make a CREATIVE DRAWING LIKE A MAP from conflict to resolution. This map can be any drawing that helps to visualize the journey that leads from a misunderstanding or conflict to a positive and agreeable resolution, and also incorporates all of their steps on their list. They should consider some of the pitfalls that are encountered along the way, and to either avoid them or work out of them to progress toward resolution. Basically, they are putting the steps, and the do's and don'ts of conflict resolution.

This enjoyable activity helps to portray conflict resolution principles (rule list) and an analogy or representation of healthy conflict resolution (map).

When completed and the portraits are hung on the wall, have the couples walk around the gallery of conflict management, take pictures, and identify what they are doing well, and what they want to improve on in how they handle conflicts.

**OPTON:** Review the Steps of and incorporate them in the group activity about conflict resolution just described (either before or after the presentations) and/or the Assertive Exercise (below).

## ACTIVITY: APOLOGIES & FORGIVENESS

The following section provides a simple formula for giving and receiving apologies (at the end of Session Two in the workbook). This can be included here when you assign groups to create the conflict resolution plans/pictures. You can encourage the groups to include these aspects of apologies in their conflict resolution plans. Or you can insert this during the group presentations as an add on to what the groups described (at least one group usually mentions apologies, so you can use that as a springboard to go through this before the next group presents.



Or, if you do not include it here, then you can end this session with it. It can be a good way to transition out of the previous section where deeper and more emotional issues may have been touched upon and end the session with a lighter activity.

Effectively giving and receiving apologies are necessary for all three major topics in Session Two: acknowledging a bad attitude and getting back to a positive attitude of trust toward a partner; dealing with misunderstandings and conflicts (which is what we are working on right now); and the last section, of working through deeper betrayals of trust. Apologizing will occur during all three and the better you are at giving and receiving apologies, then the better you will be at working through all three challenges to your trust.

One of the essential skills to working through forgiveness and rebuilding trust is the *ability to apologize*. You can ask the class, How many of you ever were taught to apologize when you were growing up? How about when you were in school—did anyone teach a class on how to say I am sorry? The simple formula is to first acknowledge what you did wrong (or how you came across to your partner) and then to say the words, “I am sorry.” Many times, this is enough.

However, the following exercise provides more depth to the way to effectively apologize because sometimes hurts and misunderstandings become complicated.

## 1. Steps to Saying “I’m Sorry



Offenses can be intentional or unintentional! We do not always mean to hurt another person’s feelings; we may not even *know* we have upset someone. So when do we apologize—only when we meant harm or whenever we “come across” in hurtful or upsetting ways whether we meant to or not? So

sometimes you admit what you said or did and apologize for that, and other times you listen and understand the way that you “came across” to your partner and apologize for that (EXAMPLE: I realize that I *came across* as putting you in an embarrassing position when I talked about you in that way with our friends...I am so sorry.) This is the TWO-STEP approach and can be easily used with many misunderstandings and minor offenses.

Step One: Acknowledge what your partner is saying you did or said that bothered him/her.

This requires that you STOP arguing and defending yourself and restate what your partner is saying. “So the way you took it when I made that comment was that...” or “OK; your point is that I embarrassed you when I made the comment...”

Step Two: Apologize for what you said or did that was either hurtful or

*came across in a hurtful way.*

This could be either an admission of what you said or did that was hurtful. In many cases, this is enough and an apology will not need to go any further. However, sometimes an explanation is helpful...and in this case you may need to go to step three and four. And other times you feel compelled to explain yourself whether it is helpful or not (and there are some people who cannot seem to be able to stop themselves from explaining why they did what they did). In these cases, follow the points under step three and four so that your apology does not turn into a Supreme Court defense!

**Step Three:** *Briefly* explain your own motives and perspective.

The first two steps may be enough for many situations. But sometimes an explanation helps. And there are some partners who have a compulsion to always explain themselves—so here are a couple of pointers for providing an explanation.

When you need to explain yourself, try to be *brief*. It is a common mistake that we spend many more words and much more time explaining our actions than apologizing to and empathizing with our partner.

There is a small but explosive word that is very often used at this point in an apology. It is the little word--“BUT.” This word minimizes what had just been said in order to emphasize what you are about to say. So, if you apologize, and then say “*but* what I meant was...” the result will be that you will sound like you didn’t really apologize for anything. The only thing that will be emphasized will be what followed the word “*but*.”

**Step Four:** Apologize again after the word “*but*” so that what is emphasized is the apology, not your explanation.

Therefore, end step three’s brief explanation with the word “*but*” and go on to repeat your apology (step one and two). Putting it all together it would sound like this if you made an unintentional comment that hurt your partner’s feelings:

*OK, so the way you were affected when I made that comment was that you thought I was trying to make you look bad. Is that right? OK, then listen (spoken genuinely) I realize that I came across as putting you in an embarrassing position when I talked about you not wanting to leave our house tonight to go to our friend’s. I could have been more sensitive to your feelings and I am sorry. I thought I was just joking around and being funny BUT I can see why you felt bad. And again, I am sorry for embarrassing you.*

**Pick out the four steps in the above scenario.**

## 2. Apologies Must Be Received

The last point to emphasize is that the one who is apologized to should



RECEIVE the apology. This is done by saying “Thank you for listening and understanding my perspective.” Or, “I appreciate that you *get it*. Or even, “I forgive you.”

For each of the four steps taken by the one making the apology there are four corresponding responses by the one who is receiving the apology.

<u>OFFENDER</u>		<u>OFFENDED</u>
ACKNOWLEDGE	—————>	LISTEN
APOLOGIZE	—————>	RECEIVE
BRIEFLY CLARIFY	—————>	BELIEVE
APOLOGIZE AGAIN	—————>	ACCEPT

1. Listen: The first response is to listen. Remember the body language SOLER—keep an open mind and posture to your partner when an apology is being given.

2. Receive: The second response is to actually receive the apology. This requires that you make some gesture and/or response that let’s your partner know that you have both heard and accepted this apology. In many cases, this is sufficient.

3. Believe: However, if your partner feels the need to explain the how, when, where and why of their circumstances and motives, then you need to try to believe them. This “belief” can sometimes be stated as simply as “I believe you- thank you for explaining yourself.”

4. Accept: Apologies that have an explanation must restate and end on the apology. In the same way, the one listening must again receive the apology and take it to heart. This can be the hardest step because often you feel that what was done was uncalled for... and unfair. So you may need a little time but work to have the willingness to let go of the hurt and the offensive act.

Once this activity is completed and the table groups have made their presentations, transition to the last section of Session Two, dealing with a severe breach of trust.

**DO NOT OMIT:** Explain the sensitivity of this last section of Session Two: We now come to a very sensitive topic of trust... what to do if someone in a

relationship seriously breaks the trust of a partner. There may be some of you who have experienced or are experiencing a breakdown in your trust. My hope is that this section is helpful to you; that it does not over-simplify the complex experience of a crisis of trust, but that it helps to define the experience and clarify what you can do as a couple to work through broken trust.

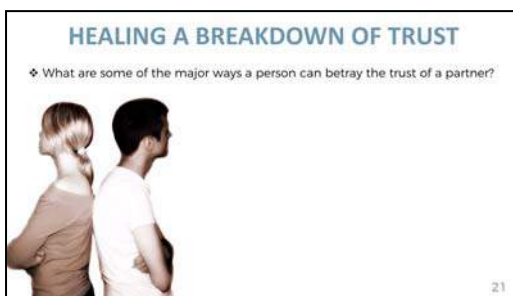


Also, we are NOT going to focus on the repeating breaches of trust but rather on how to work through a breach of trust that the offending partner acknowledges and then stops. It is simply too complicated and involved for this class to consider repeating offenses. However, if

a couple can understand what is involved in reconciling a past offense that is no longer repeating then they can be in a much better position to work it through successfully.

This is a class and not therapy, even though this topic is many times an agenda in marital therapy. So, if you have been going through a broken trust in your relationship, I would ask that you not share your experience with the class at this point. Out of respect for your privacy and the focus of the class, let's talk through this topic and see what you can do to maximize HOPE for your relationship. Many couples have navigated through the agony of betrayal to rebuild their relationship and actually find good gains as they move through their journey.

In this section, you will create and brainstorm with the class answers to questions on **THREE flip charts (Causes of a broken trust; Impact of a broken trust; and Forgiveness/Rebuilding Trust.** Essentially, you are using the workbook topics and questions to guide a class discussion. The first question and flip chart is this: Ask the class **What are the major ways that a person can betray the trust of a partner? Write on flip chart CAUSES OF A BROKEN TRUST.**



**"DISCUSSION QUESTION"** *What are some of the major ways a person can betray the trust of a partner?* Ideas: Use the class as a whole to collect as many ideas as possible for serious breaks of trust. **Breaking someone's trust is always serious. But there are certainly different**

degrees of a broken trust. You can have an innocent misunderstanding that once talked through turns out to not even be a big deal. But on the other hand you can have a breach of trust that is so major that it takes years to resolve. We

are talking about major breakdowns of trust. *Often, infidelity is mentioned first or early on—after writing on chart, state:* **There are other breakdowns of trust. What is another, list each one, and ask “What would be another serious breach of trust in a relationship?”** The purpose of this is to list on a board anything that a couple in the class may be experiencing without requiring that couple to self-disclose. But by listing it they will identify with whatever example you use and apply your points to their situation. Be sure that someone mentions financial irresponsibility or debt as one of the ways trust is broken. Financial debt and secrecy will be used as the example in this lesson plan.

After collecting those ideas, write on new flip chart **IMPACT OF A BROKEN TRUST**. This is the second major flip chart question/topic. Then ask, **“What are the normal reactions/the IMPACT to a major breakdown of trust.”** Begin with this.

**When trust is broken, there are some very strong emotions that can take a long time to resolve. But I want to begin with imagining if this breach in trust is unexpected, a “discovery” then what would be the first response?** You can group these emotions in the four overlapping stages of a breakdown of trust. You are prompting the class to say SHOCK or something close to it. Mark on your flip chart with IMPACT at the top the responses that the class mentions. If they do not say something related to shock, they will most likely describe the storm so write their answers just a little down from the top, leaving room for shock. Then prompt again what would be the initial reaction if this betrayal was found out unexpectedly. Once the class mentions shock, then write on the flip chart **1. SHOCK and then 2. STORM** (above the description of emotional reactions suggested by the class). Continue with: **You can write SHOCK and STORM next to 1 and 2 in your workbooks. What are some other emotions or reactions that occur during the storm?** If the class happens to mention some type of questioning like: Why did this happen to me? Or, how did this happen? Then put SEARCH on the flip chart.

***When someone breaks your trust what emotions are likely to be felt?***  
*Ideas:* Although this discussion question is not in the participant workbook, it can be used to generate discussion from the class on the emotional reaction of the second impact (storm). After the class has given you emotional reactions and you have written them on the board, you can use the power point to summarize the emotional response pattern:

However, the class tends to come up with the first and second stage on their own fairly easily. However, you may need to give them this third stage if no one suggests a stage that involves trying to make sense of what happened. You can prompt this stage by stating: There is a 3-letter question that is frequently asked

over and over: **“Why?” Or by just stating that: Often a person in the crisis of trust asks questions. What are some of the questions they ask?**

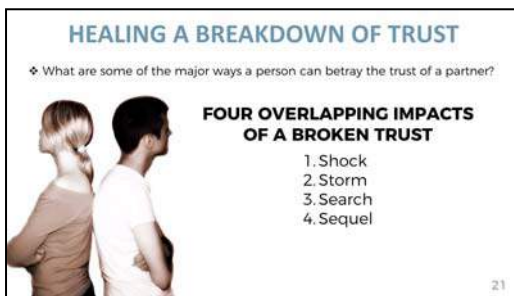
Write 3. SEARCH on chart.

**3. SEARCH-**This stage overlaps with the time of storm and involves a search to find some meanings to what had broken your trust. This can lead to understanding areas of the relationship that may need to be revised because they created vulnerabilities that led to the offensive act(s). Make it clear that each spouse is responsible for his/her actions. However, a spouse can do something that creates vulnerability in a partner. Therefore, both the spouse who broke trust and the partner are searching for their parts and responsibilities in the offense. In addition, many couples find meanings out of a dark time that bring some good to their relationship. These meanings do not justify what happened, nor are they even about what happened in many cases. Instead, they are often about what ultimately resulted from going through their time of storm, how they pulled together and rebuilt their relationship.

Once these three are sufficiently filled out, then put 4. SEQUEL on the flip chart. Explain: **So is it possible to work through a breakdown of trust... and what do you do to work this through?**

Someone who is in a crisis or overwhelmed with feelings related to a broken trust often has the experience of THE ETERNAL PRESENT. This is the feeling that what is going on right now will never end. The horizon points of their future close in so that the present pain and confusion is all they can see. This is what greatly decreases hope. But the reality is that those horizon points slowly do move back out to give a sense of hope, and that time changes how one feels. And if a couple does some of the things we are going to now discuss, many times their sequel is actually better in ways than what they had in their relationship before this crisis ever happened.

This stage refers to the time when a couple has moved past their crisis, rebuilding their trust and regaining a hopeful future together. Studies have shown that couples who stay together and rebuild their relationship most times feel stronger than they did before the breakdown even happened.



Before going to the third flip chart topic, click through the power point and review what you just went through. Refer to the workbook and explain the three categories of emotional reactions to a broken trust: hurt, anger and action. Explain:

**There are basically three**

categories of emotional reactions to a betrayed trust. Hurt feelings include depression, sadness, grief, pain, etc. Hurt leads to *anger*. Anger is the voice of thoughts like, *this is so unfair. Or, I never did this to you. Or, I didn't deserve to be treated this way.* Anger is an energy that is excited by a perception of a wrong. This is why anger usually leads one to take *action*.

Reconciliation, if possible, will certainly involve 1) repeated times of talking about the betrayal of trust: then 2) understanding and validation of the one who felt betrayed which also includes that the one who broke trust proves to have truly changed; and finally 3) resolution of the broken trust with repeated forgiveness and rebuilding of the trust.

One of the frequent errors a partner makes when he/she has done something that deeply offended a spouse is that they expect one or two passes through this cycle and the subsequent steps to magically fix everything. However, the reality is that apologies need to be repeated with the same amount of sincerity as the first. And the same hurt feelings may need to be validated numerous times before you or your partner can let go of the past and repair their trust-image of you.

When you review the four overlapping stages you can ask: **How long do you think it takes to work through the STORM?** You can collect ideas but you will want to put an average timeframe around 3 months to 1 year. Stage theories of crises help to portray the stages of rebuilding trust (often 3 months to 2 years). These are "ball-park" time frames and should not be treated like they are rigid structures. Having some time frame does help in a couple of ways. Many times there are questions and even conflicts as to *how long* a partner will continue to feel upset about a breakdown in trust.

Deeper hurts and more serious breakdowns of trust can take months to a couple of years to rebuild trust. Even after forgiveness is given, the process of rebuilding trust can take much longer...and with times of old "trust-pictures" temporarily disrupting the feelings of trust and closeness.

As trust is rebuilt, a more positive trust-picture or opinion of a partner will dominate your thoughts. However, you will periodically be thrown back into your worst "trust-picture" by some situation, experience or unknown trigger. Fortunately, this "regression into the past" only lasts a short time and can be settled down by some reassurance from your partner. The chart on the good, the bad and the ugly illustrates how you can shift from looking at your partner in positive ways to seeing only the worst. This is normal during the rebuilding process and should happen less and less and trust is regained.

Usually, the feelings associated with thoughts of how your trust was broken will diminish before you stop thinking about what happened. Understanding this helps you to know that it is normal to frequently think

about an offense and that over time these thoughts have less and less emotion. Eventually, the thoughts also become much less frequent and less emotional. You could say that the time between feeling emotional and focusing on what happened keeps increasing. You find your self saying at first; “I can’t stop thinking about this.” Then later; “I had a good morning—didn’t think about this once.” Then later; “I had a pretty good day.” Then later; “I had a good week.” The “later” can be weeks to months.

You need to talk it through many times; and the talks must make the one who was offended feel understood and validated. **NOTE:** There *may* be things which the offended partner has said or done (or not done) which led to increasing the vulnerability of a partner. This never excuses you—you are always responsible for your own actions. But sometimes (not always) the one whose trust was broken may need to ask the question: did I do anything that put my partner in a more vulnerable position to act in this way. This was referred to in the paragraph under the Search Stage (above).

The final resolve comes from two primary steps: when you have talked through your thoughts and shared your emotions to the point of *releasing* them (forgiveness); but then your opinion of your partner/your belief in your partner also needs to be changed (trust rebuilding).

Take a third sheet of the flip chart and at the top write “Forgiveness” and about three-fourths down write “Rebuilding Trust.”

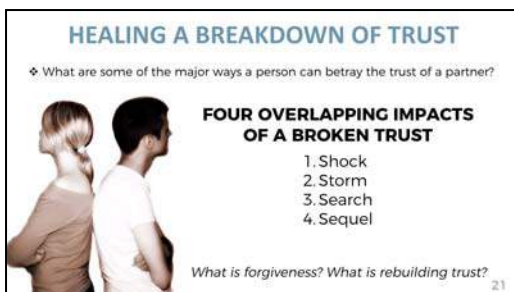
So... there are two basic relationship activities that you must engage in to *fully reconcile*. The first is forgiveness and the second is the rebuilding of trust. These two relationship activities are related but definitely distinct and independent.

For instance, think about this, can you forgive someone but still not trust them? The answer is an obvious “yes” and this question can introduce the difference between forgiveness and trust.



**“DISCUSSION QUESTION” *What is forgiveness?***

Have the class generate ideas about forgiveness and write them on the flip chart.



Afterward, you can summarize by saying, **Forgiveness is the “letting go” of your anger, hurt and resentments of previous actions. It is like wiping the slate clean. It is helpful if you think of forgiveness in three ways—kind of like stages:**

1. Forgiveness is a *decision*- you do not *have* to forgive someone...that is a decision you make; an act of your will; no matter how many times someone asks, forgiveness never comes unless you decide to take the step. There are some who choose to NOT forgive, or never come to the point of making the decision to forgive. Forgiveness begins with the decision to forgive. And even if someone never asks, you can still forgive... in fact, can't you even forgive someone who never asked and is already deceased? Of course, because forgiveness is an act of an individual's will.

2. Forgiveness is a *journey*- you will often have to forgive someone for the same offense over and over before you actually are able release all of your emotion and reactions to being wronged. You will never forget, but there is often time involved in forgiving (processing) more serious hurts. In fact, this is what the journey of forgiveness is... processing the emotions, making a decision to let it go, and then putting it behind you. However, the journey is doing this over and over. There will be many times that something triggers a reminder of what hurt you, and your progress of forgiving will be set back with a resurgence of the emotions of betrayal. Therefore, this journey has lots of ups and downs, times of feeling like you are back to normal, and other times of feeling like the breach of trust just happened. However, as you let go of these emotions and work through the forgiving process, you come to a third stage of forgiveness.

3. Forgiveness is a *destination*- there is a culmination point when you decide to finally let something go...to no longer bring it up or think it through. But rather, you now want to turn a corner and resist any thoughts about this pain. This is the final point of true forgiveness—even though you may sometimes be tempted to go back into the hurt and anger, you know that you have worked through the journey of releasing long enough and you want to let the past go.

Forgiving someone and rebuilding your trust in that person are related, but distinctly different. Trust is related to your opinion of a person. You can let go of your anger and resentment in forgiveness but still think negatively of a person. Therefore, trust is earned. It is like a reputation—you earn it over time.

Obviously, it is possible to forgive someone without ever rebuilding trust. It is not likely that you will trust someone you never forgive.



**"DISCUSSION QUESTION"**

*What are the differences between forgiveness and rebuilding trust?*

class answer these questions before you show the power point slide with all three answers.



**FOCUS**

*Forgiveness focuses on which time frame... the present, the past or the future (an event in the present, past or future? The past-yes that is correct. But what about rebuilding trust? Forgiveness focuses on letting go of your feelings related to a PAST situation or experience. Trust, on the*

*other hand, focuses on the present and FUTURE belief you have in someone.*



**ORDER**

*Can you forgive someone but choose to not trust them again? Of course, and sometimes that is the right position to take with someone because they have not changed or earned any trust. But think about this... can you trust someone again*

*without first forgiving them? Probably not. A deep true trust comes from a positive belief in someone and this would likely be sabotaged by an unforgiving attitude toward them. These two questions help to show that forgiveness is a requirement of rebuilding trust, but that just because you forgive someone does not mean that you will trust them again. Trust is a belief in someone that they will not do again what they had done to hurt or betray you. Forgiveness, on the other hand, can be given to someone even if they are no longer here or available (e.g. you can forgive someone even if that person has died).*



**SOURCE**

*Can you forgive someone who never asks for forgiveness and has not even acknowledged their wrongdoing? In fact,*

*can you forgive someone who does not even want your forgiveness?* This question shows a third difference between forgiveness and rebuilding trust. Forgiveness comes from the individual and can be given as a gift without any request or involvement of the other. Certainly it is easier to forgive someone who asks and has shown sorrow for the hurt they have caused. But with this or without this, forgiveness is the act of an individual. On the other hand, rebuilding trust is a joint activity in a relationship that requires that one earn back trust while the other invest a belief in their partner. This is why we say, “Trust is both earned AND given.” For it is possible for someone to earn the trust of another while that other person never acknowledges it! So, full reconciliation in a relationship clearly involves forgiving AND the rebuilding of a belief in your partner.

A broken trust alters your opinion of your partner. You cannot just forgive and then move on like it never happened because your thoughts of what this person is like or is capable of doing or saying has changed. Rebuilding your trust means that you rebuild a positive belief or opinion in your partner. This takes time and your partner has to also help you by earning back your respect and trust.

You can review the perceptual shifting pictures and talk about how radically altered is the “picture” of what you think about your partner and the significant drop in trust that occurs when you have this kind of a crisis in trust. This sets the stage for showing the importance of the “offender” to be very open and disclosing through out the rebuilding of trust. The hurt partner will need to “know” more about his/her partner than usual in order to reconstruct a positive belief in that partner. Each situation that occurs where there is a need for disclosure becomes an opportunity to help rebuild the trust and belief that your partner has in you.

It is suggested that you choose an example story of a couple who had a breakdown of trust to use at this point for a “case study” – consider using the financial breach of trust as an example and tell a story something like this:

Duane and Maria had a fairly good relationship (put the sliders toward the top of the RAM to represent their relationship). However, Maria was the one they decided would run the finances because she was very disciplined and regimented. Duane was a romantic and loved to do fun and adventurous things together. They had planned on a honeymoon of a Grecian cruise but Maria talked Duane out of it because of the costs of the wedding and getting settled.

Duane hoped for making this cruise happen but they had a child and then shortly before their fifth anniversary when he had planned on surprising Maria with this trip she announced she was pregnant with their second.

Years slipped by and their relationship shifted to the background with little romance or adventure as Maria emphasized being practical and fragile.

Over time, this became a source of tension because Duane would want to buy some treats for the kids or a present for Maria and she would argue that it wasn't necessary. Duane was an easy-going guy and didn't like to make waves, so he tended to back down and give in to her judgment.

However, somewhere around fourteen years into their marriage he saw a VISA commercial and made the call just out of curiosity. When he learned he could get a card with practically unlimited credit, he decided to apply and put the cruise on the credit card without Maria knowing (she would never have approved). He figured he could work some overtime, odd and end jobs and eventually pay it off, no problem. However, after giving his info and address, it struck him that he couldn't have the bills come to the house. So, he regrouped, went to the Post Office and opened a PO Box and just have the bills sent there.

Ask the class if what Duane is doing is right or wrong—point out that often major mistakes have small first steps that appear to be justifiable. Also give Duane the benefit of the doubt that he has a good heart. And finally, this story sets the stage for both Duane and Maria to work on some changes in how they run their finances as a part of the rebuilding of trust process...it is not just Duane that may need to change but also Maria will have to acknowledge that she created some of the vulnerabilities that led Duane to take this action.

Continue with the story: They had the trip of their lives. It was refreshing. It was the longest time they had been together without their three kids. Everything was wonderful, and Duane was now about \$10,000 in debt, but had a plan. However, a couple of months after the cruise Duane was laid off. He became depressed (why do you think?) and Maria became more and more worried—for their finances and for her husband. He didn't go to the post office for those months—he figured there was nothing he could do so he just kind of stuck his head in the sand. He did get called back to work after four months but hadn't gone to pick up his bills when VISA called their home number and Maria answered.

She argued with VISA that they did NOT have a card—there was some mistake. But when she said, "We have never received a bill at our home" the rep responded with, "Oh that is because they go to your PO Box." When Maria ran down to the post office and asked for the mail from their PO Box, and actually received a box of mail, what stage of a broken trust do you think she entered? SHOCK.

How do you think Maria reacted when she started opening the bills and saw a \$10K balance with no idea what it was spent on? What happened to her

**“trust-picture”... to her feelings of “knowing” Duane?** Trust should naturally flow from what you know about a partner...so when trust is significantly lowered then it is normal to wonder if you really know your partner for who he or she is. This is an important concept for rebuilding trust. During the rebuilding time, the partner who broke trust will need to be willing to make more of his/her life *known* to the partner who is trying to rebuild trust. **What do you think Duane walked into when he came home that evening?**

At this point you can engage the class with a discussion about what Maria will need to do. Remind them of the stages of forgiveness (decision, journey and destination) and what forgiveness is (described above in the, focus, order and source). You can point out that Duane could make this forgiving journey easier or harder. Ask the class, **What could Duane do to make it easier...harder?** Remember that Maria could forgive even if Duane does not ask for it or show any remorse. But rebuilding her trust in Duane will need Duane’s involvement—he will have to show responsibility.

Also, you can explore what Maria may be willing to acknowledge and even change in the way they handle their finances. You could build this into the story by saying: **After Maria had reached a point of forgiving Duane, she was still struggling with her trust. She was not requiring as much disclosure as she did in the first couple months, but periodically she still questioned him—almost like an interrogation. But one day she was out to lunch with her best friend who asked how they were doing and Maria answered, “The one thing I have learned for sure is to never trust Duane with the finances.” This led Maria’s friend to respond, “Maria, can I tell you something I am wondering about your relationship with Duane and what happened. I know that Duane is completely responsible for what he did. However, I also know that you were really tight with the finances. My husband is about as romantic as a stone. If he had Duane’s passion and romance and I ran the finances, I would get him as much money as I could!!”**

**Maria initially resented these statements but after a few days of thinking about them she decided to go to a financial advisor with Duane. Then result was a reworking of their budget so that Duane had a regular amount of money that he could use with his own discretion.** These relationship changes often happen as a couple works through the stages of rebuilding trust and can be some of the good that comes out of a difficult and trying time. You can also point out that Duane should have been more assertive with Maria as they worked through their crisis. It may have been wise to delay asserting the ways that Maria had made him vulnerable by being overly controlling. However, as they made some progress he should have become more assertive in order to not have this issue repeat or the vulnerability continue.

In addition, you can tie in the idea of *perceptual shift* and the picture examples to show that Maria’s trust picture of Duane would be radically altered in negative ways. In fact, she would feel like she does not even know Duane. The process of rebuilding trust requires that the one who betrayed trust must let the partner know things that previously were overlooked, ignored or taken for granted. Duane would need to be willing to let himself be known much more than normal, and disclose things to Maria to help her trust become rebuilt in him. You can show on the RAM how trust comes from what you know about another, so that when trust is broken then you must have a willingness to keep opening up and disclosing yourself so that your partner can test out what he/she believes in you. So that over time, the positive trust picture becomes dominant and stable, and replaces the extreme negative picture (remember the picture of the angels and demons).

You can also show how a couple can have a flashback of the crisis in trust with a reminder of some sort. **For instance, a few months after Maria forgave Duane they were watching a TV and a VISA commercial came on—you can imagine that she wanted to say something to him. And during the “journey” of forgiving that would be appropriate. But after reaching a “destination” of forgiving then she would need to work to resolve the memory internally rather than between her and Duane.**

**SUMMARY**



- \* Forgiveness and trust are related, but yet very different.
- \* Forgiveness is letting go of the hurt and anger related to a past event where one partner treated another wrongly.
- \* Forgiveness has a past focus. Rebuilding trust, on the other hand, has a future focus.

\* Rebuilding trust is the process of putting faith in your partner again and developing a firm confidence that your partner will not do the offensive behavior again.

### 3. Putting It All Together: Forgiveness

Review the session before closing.

1. Your attitude of trust or belief in your partner is FOUNDATIONAL to your relationship. This means that you must take responsibility for your attitude, and become really good at refocusing your thoughts onto the positive strengths of your partner, and letting go of your pet peeves.
2. Negative attitudes can foster deep resentments and fix your trust-picture in

a very negative way. There is a road back to love and respect from a bitter resentment, but it is better to avoid going there by keeping a check on your attitude toward your spouse (how you think about and relate to the 'partner in your head.').

3. Conflicts and misunderstandings are best handled with an agreed-upon plan for how to best resolve differences and hurt feelings. You worked on conflict resolution plans that were captured in a picture. Make sure you take those plans out of this class and into your home and relationship!

We also found that there are some practical steps to giving and receiving an apology. Apologies have little meaning if you do not first convey that you heard and understood what you said or did that bothered your partner. Therefore, acknowledge how you came across before you say, "I'm sorry." And the most heart-felt and genuine apology will not lead to reconciliation unless it is received.

4. Finally, we looked at major challenges to trust and how you can work through those. We found that forgiveness is letting go of your anger and hurt when someone has "wronged" you... whether it was intentional or not; or whether it was anything done wrong or you just perceived it as wrong. In all cases, forgiveness means that you let go of your emotional reaction.

We also found that rebuilding trust is the process of regaining your faith and belief in your partner, especially in the particular area where your trust was broken. Your "trust-picture" comes from what you focus on when you think of your partner and, over time, becomes more stable and positive when your partner earns back your trust.



Forgiveness is given... trust is earned and it is also GIVEN! This is why the trust-picture needs to be refreshed regularly. If there ever is a serious betrayal, you do not want an underground fault (like what causes earthquakes) to have undermined your

opinion of your spouse, and the pressure of the betrayal to be the force that caves in the weak areas caused by the unresolved issues you have with your partner.

Briefly review Step Two of a huddle (below).

## STEP TWO TRUST (Patch Up)

 15 minutes

1. Admit Your Own Shortcomings  
("Pride comes before a *fight*")

Talk with your partner about the shortcomings you listed in the first step of Replacing Resentments with Respect. Do not be defensive or blaming. When you listen to your partner explain his/her shortcomings, make sure that you acknowledge and receive any apologies your partner gives. Don't badger or attack your partner. Rather try to accept the things your partner says, be quick to apologize and work together to let go of any built-up irritations or resentments.

2. Remember Your Partner's Strengths  
("Beauty is in the eye of the beholder")

Take even more time than before and describe the positive qualities your partner has. Tell each other what you appreciate about the ways your partner has given to you, supported you, acted in your interest, provided for you, and sacrificed for you. Identify at least five actions or personal qualities that you have seen and appreciate in your partner over the last month and explain them to him or her in gratitude. Describe in detail the strengths you see in your partner. Refuse to point out or talk about any negative or critical thoughts that would overshadow the positive qualities in your partner. Make sure that you receive the compliments your partner gives you.

3. Focus On Ways Your Partner Helps You  
("The whole is greater than the sum of its *partners*")

Affirm to each other out loud that you believe that the differences in your partner help to fulfill you; make you someone more than you could ever be on your own. Choose one way that you two are different (maybe it could be a recent conflict that brought out these differences). Talk about how that difference actually benefits you two in your relationship. Try to work together during this conversation to both offer ways that the benefits of the differences are greater than the friction of the differences. Come up with one or two new ways to look at this difference, and how you want to remind each other of this better perspective. End with affirming your appreciation for each other. Recount all of the ways that you have acted in concert with each other over the last month. Talk together about the areas of agreement and similarity between you and your partner. What you think in your heart about your partner will set the course for how you relate together. Keep a positive attitude in your relationship!



**"DEEP THOUGHT"** *"A successful marriage requires falling in love many times, always with the same person."* ~Mignon McLaughlin.

## INSTRUCTOR EVALUATION FORM FOR SESSION TWO

Rate your accomplishment of the lesson goals on a 1 to 5 scale.

- 1 Not taught**
- 2 Very difficult to teach this point**
- 3 Somewhat difficult to teach this point**
- 4 Somewhat easy to teach this point**
- 5 Very easy to teach this point**

### Goals

- Understand the dynamic link of trust (versus trustworthiness).
- Learn what “keeping a good attitude” fully involves.
- Learn the ways that a trust-picture can slowly become distorted and resentments can set in.
- Develop practical plans of reframing and solution-oriented approaches for changing bad attitudes to respectful attitudes.
- Develop rules for how to successfully handle conflicts.
- Appreciate the extent of emotional responses when a partner finds out that his/her spouse seriously broke his/her trust.
- Gain a relative timeframe for the stages of the reactions to a breakdown of trust.
- Differentiate between the process of forgiving and the process of rebuilding trust.
- Learn the second step of a huddle: affirming and appreciating your spouse while regularly taking inventory of your trust-picture.

**Lesson-At-a-Glance**    Total Class Time \_\_\_\_\_

Section	Suggested Time	Actual Time
A. Your Actions...But So Is Your Attitude	20 minutes	_____
B. How You Become Resentful	10 minutes	_____

C. Replacing Resentments With Respect	10 minutes	_____
D. Creating a Conflict Resolution Plan	35 minutes	_____
E. Healing Betrayals of Trust	40 minutes	_____
Step Two: Patch Up (TRUST)	05 minutes	_____

## OVERVIEW OF SESSION THREE

Reliance, the third love link, refers to depending upon your partner to meet your personal, emotional or physical needs. When your partner meets your needs in positive ways, then your opinion or “trust picture” is altered and your feelings of trust increase. Many of these needs are met by what you do for each other, what you do together, and how you have divided the responsibilities of your home between your two roles in your marriage. It is much easier to keep a positive attitude toward your partner when both are trying to meet each others’ needs. A positive “trust-picture” prompts you to “rely” on your partner again and with more meaningful needs. This is especially bonding when both partners are mutually meeting each others’ needs.

### Goals

1. Gain an understanding of the importance of meeting your spouse’s unique needs and wants.
2. Develop the belief that mutual need fulfillment will strengthen the bond of the marriage and deepen the character of each spouse.
3. Find agreement on the roles and division of responsibilities in your marriage and family.
4. Establish a regular plan for handling your finances in mutually agreeable ways.
5. OPTIONAL: Review the “family templates” that you brought into your marriage and family from your experiences growing up.
6. Form a plan to regularly take inventory of the changing needs in your marriage.
7. Learn the ten top activities that foster intimacy in the togetherness of a marriage relationship.

### Lesson-At-a-Glance

A. Qualities of Reliance	15 minutes
B. Actions of Reliance	20 minutes
C. Keeping Your Relationship A Priority with Huddles	30 minutes
D. Description of the Top Ten Intimacy Activities	35 minutes
STEP THREE Dream Up RELY	20 minutes

### Material Checklist

Use the Relationship Attachment Model® (RAM) display board. This hands-on teaching tool represents the core of this curriculum and is an excellent visual aid. You must use the LINKS workbooks (several versions available for ordering through [www.nojerks.com](http://www.nojerks.com)). Each workbook comes with a mini-RAM. It is beneficial to have one workbook per individual in the class. You will also need to have a dry erase board or a paper (preferably) to write additional notes. The paper notes can be taped on the walls to provide further visual aids to the accumulating material. A power point projector and screen is needed. The lesson plans provide the outline and structure for each session and are printed throughout the lesson plans. They also match the LINKS workbooks for participants.

**SESSION THREE**  
**RECIPROCALLY MEETING NEEDS**

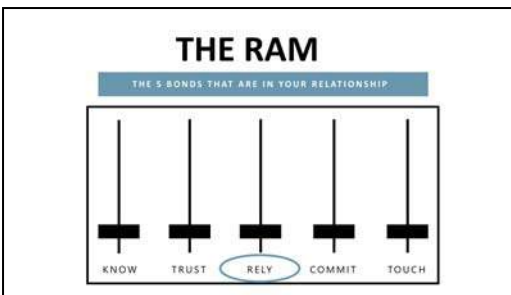


You should have this slide on the screen as the participants enter and take their seats. You can interact with the participants by reviewing the first two dynamics of the RAM and about the first two corresponding steps of those sessions. If you assigned homework then you should also review it at this time. Make reference to the RAM board and remind them that you are now expanding the third area of the RAM (Rely).

\* \* \* \*

**A. QUALITIES OF RELIANCE**

 **20 minutes**



Begin with briefly reviewing the RAM and the KNOW and TRUST dynamic bonds. This session is centered on the RELY bond in a relationship which is all about meeting each other's needs, and the roles that the two partners take in their relationship to support and depend on each other. A key

concept of healthy reliance is "mutuality" and "reciprocity"- does the couple have a mutually satisfying division of responsibilities in their roles and in the activities of their relationship? You can introduce the topic of reliance with this question.



**What does it mean to rely on someone? How is this different than just trusting them?** Collect some ideas from the class and see if they can identify differences between relying on someone and trusting someone. Trust is a feeling of confidence and security that comes from what you

THINK or believe about a person... your opinion or "trust picture" of them. Reliance is more of an ACTION of depending on someone. It is possible to trust someone that you are not depending on, and it is also possible to be dependent on a person you do not trust. An illustration of the difference between the first three bonds of the RAM (know, trust and rely) is when you were in a school class

THINK or believe about a person... your opinion or "trust picture" of them. Reliance is more of an ACTION of depending on someone. It is possible to trust someone that you are not depending on, and it is also possible to be dependent on a person you do not trust. An illustration of the difference between the first three bonds of the RAM (know, trust and rely) is when you were in a school class

where the entire grade for the class was based on a group project. When you looked around at those in your group, your “know” was high because you knew those fellow students really well. And your “rely” was really high because you were depending on them for your final grade; but your “trust” in a few of them was low because you believed that they were not hard workers and would slack on this project, causing your final grade to



be lowered. High know, low trust, and high rely can lead to anxious and very mixed emotions. But you can see that trust is more about what you believe while rely is more about some active way you are depending on another.

After collecting ideas from the class, give the definition on the power point. **Rely is the feeling of fulfillment that comes from what you do for your partner and what your partner does for you, how you meet your partner's needs and wants and how your partner meets your needs and wants** Then ask a more personal question to talk about in the large class discussion.



**“DIG DEEPER”** There are major theories and countless research studies that support each of the five bonding dynamics of the RAM. A previous DIG DEEPER (Session One) explained that each of the five dynamics corresponds to a major “cluster” of the self—the sensory self, the mental self, the emotional self, the volitional self, and the tactile/sexual self). In addition, each dynamic is supported by one or more psychological or relational theories. For instance, this dynamic of RELY is supported by a theory called Social Exchange Theory. This major relationship theory has produced much research and can be summarized in a simplistic way: *You scratch my back and I will scratch yours, and we both will be happy.* Personal satisfaction in a relationship is directly connected with *mutual need fulfillment*.

You can describe this theory as the measure of the *give and take* in a relationship (or you would refer to this as a cost-benefit analysis of a relationship). These “exchanges” are not always equal. Social Exchange theory explains that the feelings you have about a relationship depend on your view of:

- 1) The balance between what you put into the relationship and what you get out of it.
- 2) What you believe you deserve to get out of a relationship.
- 3) And, what you believe are your chances of getting something better.

There are many popular books that have applied this theory to marriage relationships—*Men are from Mars and Women are from Venus*; *His Needs, Her Needs*; and *Love Languages* to name a few.




**"DISCUSSION QUESTION"** *What are some ways that you rely on your partner?* Ideas: companionship, support, financial needs, emotional support, love, physical needs, affection, sexual intimacy, etc.

Let's look at two areas of reliability... first the qualities that make a reliable partner, and then the actions of reliable partners. There are four qualities of reliable partners.

**QUALITIES OF A RELIABLE PARTNER**


Consistent



**Consistent:** The first quality needed to be a reliable person is that you are consistent. This is often what is meant by a "dependable" person... you can count on them, they are predictable in good ways. This consistency needs to be complimented by the other three qualities (versus being consistently absent, or consistently unresponsive).

**QUALITIES OF A RELIABLE PARTNER**

Consistent  
Available



**Available:** This refers to both physically and emotionally available. Your spouse knows that when they reach out to you, you are there. This requires that you are not consumed with your own mental load when with your spouse, or on your devices and physically present but mentally in another world. It is crucial to

establish clear boundaries so that there is a mutual understanding and agreement of times when you are focused on other things, devices and activities, and the times when you are "present" with your partner.

**QUALITIES OF A RELIABLE PARTNER**

Consistent  
Available  
Responsive



**Responsive:** This refers to a willingness to pitch in and help with whatever your partner is doing or needing. It is possible to have a partner that is overly needy and demanding, but outside of this extreme, it is important to have an openness and willing desire to take on some of the load

of your partner. There will be an opportunity in this session to define and discuss the division of responsibilities. But a responsive attitude means that

you both take steps to participate with your partner’s responsibilities. With all of these qualities, a mutual investment of both partners reduces the power struggles or imbalances that occur when one is responsive and the other is not.

**QUALITIES OF A RELIABLE PARTNER**

- Consistent
- Available
- Responsive
- Engaged



**Engaged:** This final characteristic goes a step further than just available and responsive. It means that you initiate involvement and support. I remember this one husband who would arrive home on Thursdays a couple hours before his wife from their work settings. Every other day, she was home several

hours before him. But on Thursdays, he liked to clean the major living areas of their home, and then make sure he was laying on the couch “asleep” when his wife walked in the door, giving her the impression that he had done nothing. But then as she walked around, she would see all the helpful things he had done. He initiated engagement in responsibilities that most times were handled by his wife. But he wanted her to know that he was not just waiting to be asked; he took the initiative without her even being home.

So, when both partners are trying to be consistently available, responsive and engaged, they develop an interdependence where they know the other is “there for me,” and “I am never alone.”

There is a question in your workbook:

**QUALITIES OF A RELIABLE PARTNER**

- Consistent
- Available
- Responsive
- Engaged

Your partner’s “mental load” is the unspoken, mental running list of everything they need to do. What are some examples of your own mental load, and ways you can apply the qualities of CARE both to understand and support your partner and their mental load?





**“DISCUSSION QUESTION”**

*What are some examples of your own mental load, and ways you can apply the qualities of CARE both to understand and support your partner and their mental load?*

Let me explain what is a mental load. Your “mental load” is the unspoken, mental running list of everything you need to do. This is a term that has become quite popular—what is the “load” you are carrying around in your head? It is the list of things you have to get done, your worries, your tasks, your responsibilities and concerns. Oftentimes, we do not really share this mental load with our partner. So I would like you to take five as couples, and first share what is involved in your typical mental load. Then, talk about some ways that you both could better support each other with your mental loads. Tie in to your discussion the four characteristics of reliability (CARE) so that you find some ways to put

reliability into everyday life together. Being able to rely on your partner to help you with some of your mental loads builds a really positive team spirit in your relationship.

Have couples face each other and share their mental loads and discuss ways to be supportive of each other.

## B. ACTIONS OF RELIANCE

 35 minutes



This next section is a very practical approach to two major ways you need to work together: how you divide and discuss responsibilities in the home and with your kids; and how you manage and talk about your finances.

The first way you work together is how you have defined your roles and divide and share responsibilities. This next exercise helps you to look at the agreement that you have in the area of roles and division of responsibilities. Let me read the directions for this activity.

### ACTIVITY: ROLES AND THE DIVISION OF RESPONSIBILITIES

Pair off (WORK AS COUPLES) and make a list of what you think are the 5-10 most important responsibilities you and your spouse have in your relationship. Begin by doing this without your partner's involvement. Then compare and talk about the responsibilities you both identified. Discuss what you wish you would like your partner to "take charge of" in the relationship, "be more supportive of" or "give more back" (e.g. let me decorate the den).

HUSBAND'S RESPONSIBILITIES

WIFE'S RESPONSIBILITIES

There is a question just before this exercise in your workbook that I would like you to include in your discussion after you have listed your top responsibilities and shared them together. Although this is true for all of us, many of you have to regularly revisit how you are sharing responsibilities because of work/military separations and subsequent reunions.



**DISCUSSION QUESTION** *There are times when your normal routine will change or new responsibilities will be added. Discuss some of the common obstacles to revisiting the division of responsibilities and brainstorm solutions to every obstacle.*

Before you begin, let me also describe the second exercise that I want you to do—how you manage your finances. Running a household and

managing money can be a cause of disagreement for many couples. Identify any other sources of conflict in the sharing of roles and responsibilities in your marriage. Pace your time to try to get through all three of the questions about financial management (you cannot go too deep in your conversations or take too long on any one question). Therefore, set some goals that will help improve how you run and share your financial responsibilities that you can work on once you leave this class.

### ACTIVITY: ROLES AND FINANCES

It can be rewarding—and sometimes challenging—to run the finances. Some couples have significant conflicts over differences in managing their finances. Studies have shown that money conflicts are among the top five sources of problems in marriage.

It can also be difficult making realistic financial goals and managing a budget because of unforeseen challenges and expenses. Therefore, you may need to have clear roles and plans for working together to regularly review your financial goals and make necessary adjustments.

1. Describe how you work together in your marriage to manage your finances. Do you have specific roles or responsibilities? How often do you discuss money and your finances?
2. List five financial goals that both of you want to accomplish. (What is your amount of debt? Do you have a savings plan? Do you use a budget? Do you have an emergency fund?)
3. If you were to regularly (e.g. weekly, monthly) review your finances, what major areas would you want to discuss (e.g. savings, expenses, bills, anticipated expenditures, goals, etc.)? Put a meeting time on your calendar when you can review your expenses, bills and goals.

If you do the optional activity(ies) about Family of Origin below, then afterwards, explain the difference between balanced and balancing (next section). However, if you choose to *not* do the optional activities, then skip the optional activities and go to the next section.

**OPTIONAL: Only discuss this section on *Sorting Through Family of Origin Experiences* if you have extended time.**



**“TOOLBOX” SORTING THROUGH FAMILY OF ORIGIN EXPERIENCES:** Session three provides an opportunity to introduce a discussion about the “templates” that you bring to the roles you take in your marriage and the roles you expect of your partner. It ends with an activity that can pull together the discussions about family background influences. It is this history that often prompts your expectations about your partner. However, you can have unrealistic expectations as a result of the templates that you project onto

your partner. For example, if a girl grew up with brothers who were always told, “Big boys don’t cry,” she might have a template in her mind that her husband is weak whenever he would become hurt. She may not even understand why she becomes agitated when he seems to have his feelings hurt, but still this template acts like a transparency that colors her expectations, thoughts and feelings toward him. Or if a man grew up with his mother always handling all of the housework, he may expect the same of his wife without even knowing where his expectations came from.

In the PICK Program there is an entire section on the templates that you have learned from your family. These family templates can be divided into three primary categories: 1) how we learned to handle *emotions and show love* and affection; 2) how we learned to share *power* in four areas (fulfilling responsibilities, showing attention to others, maintaining a structure of authority, and sharing ownership and “territory”); and 3) how we learned the *roles* in marriage and family—what is my role and what is my partners role. These are the three areas that are described in the following questions.

There are several ways you can help couples explore their family background. Two options will be described. The first is to have them work at their tables and make a family tree. The second option is to assign questions to either table groups or couples to discuss. If you have time, you can have them do both options.

### **OPTION #1: FAMILY TREES**

**Each table group gets a flip chart sheet and draws an outline of a tree. Then they write in the leaves of the tree decide what they want to repeat from their family upbringings; at the base of the tree, they put leaves and branches that have fallen off and write in them what they want to NOT repeat; and finally, on the branches of the tree they make small new buds and write next to each one what new things they want to add to their marriage and families that was not practiced in their upbringing.**

This activity can then be processed by the instructor by having each table group explain their trees and what they put on them. The trees can then be hung on the walls of the classroom.

### **OPTION #2: ASSIGN FAMILY OF ORIGIN QUESTIONS**

You can have the class examine the templates they learned from their families and work on revising them if needed by exploring their backgrounds with the following questions and then completing the activity at the end of this optional section. Pass out these questions to the tables for them to answer.

*Describe how your family/home setting expressed affection and made you feel loved when you were growing up. How has this affected you? How has it*

*affected the way you relate to your partner and children (if applies)?* Ideas: Try to have the participants look back on their childhood experiences from an outside vantage point. This will help them to be a little more objective when considering the ways that their family experiences have influenced the way they relate to others. Often, people will fail to see any connections between the dynamics of their family and the way they act and relate to others. This becomes a good opportunity to help them gain some insight into themselves.

You want to the participants to recognize that there are different ways that families show affection, and that there is no one right way. The importance of this exercise is to be sure that the templates that have been learned in ones childhood match what one wants in adulthood—and if not, that they have been effectively revised.

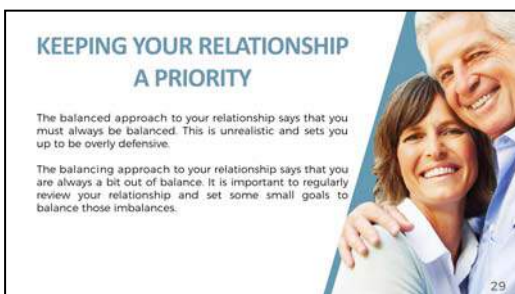
*What is your temper like? How was anger managed in the home setting you grew up in?* Ideas: This question narrows the focus to just one emotion and how it was handled. It should help some of the participants who are struggling to see any connections.

*What did you learn about your own role from each of your parents or caregivers? What did you learn to expect from a partner from how your parents or caregivers worked together?* Ideas: Have you ever watched a father and child interact? Or, a mother and her toddler? You will see that the child frequently imitates the parent. The toddler will get out his toy tools while his father works on some project. Or, play office while her mother works at her desk.

Our initial ideas about our own role and the role of a partner are shaped by what we have internalized from how our parent(s) or caregiver(s) worked together and divided up the responsibilities in their relationship. There is an old saying for women about choosing a husband: “Check out the ways that he treats his mother.” Although this is only one piece of the puzzle, there is a truth that both sons and daughters internalize a lot from their parents, and how they related to their parents and watched their parents share responsibilities initially shaped their own expectations.

-----  
**C. KEEPING YOUR RELATIONSHIP A PRIORITY WITH HUDDLES**

 **15 minutes**



Use this slide to summarize the importance of balancing the roles and responsibilities on a regular basis. **This next section shifts the focus from how couples work together in managing their**

responsibilities and finances, to a more personal aspect of how they rely on each: the ways they meet each other's personal needs and continue to understand what they are with regular meetings we will call Huddles.

A very traditional marriage assumed there was a prescribed and fixed set of roles for each partner. They approached a marriage with a belief that there was balance they should live in. This *balanced approach* suggested that there is a way to achieve balance in your life and marriage, and if you are not perfectly balanced then you are doing something wrong.

However, the structure of life, by nature is inconsistent and unpredictable. Even when marital and family traditions are strong and there is low variability of lifestyle, there are illness, changes and aging that create variations that a couple must pay attention to and make necessary adjustments. If a couple is taking the balanced approach, they are at risk to conclude that they have missed the mark and fallen short whenever they have become imbalanced in one way or another. As a result, they must rearrange the structure of their life in order to correct this deficiency.

The difficulty with this approach for many other couples is the fast pace and constant motion of today's life. They struggle to find regular time to just have a meal together. The balanced approach looks like a far-off dream that shames them every time they look at their hectic lives in its shadow. Nonetheless, many of these couples have never defined an alternative to this classic approach.

The *balancing approach* is an alternative way of MANAGING YOUR RELATIONSHIP that suggests just the opposite of the balanced approach. It states that we need to regularly be balancing our relationship because life is constantly unbalancing us. In other words, couples need to frequently take inventory of each other and look where they have had positive time together and where they have been lacking, and then set small goals to create the activities that will compensate or balance out what was missing.

The assumption is that they will always be missing something. And the key is for couples to identify those deficits when they are small and have not continued over a long time. You can put it this way: A healthy marriage relationship is not a balanced relationship. Instead, a healthy marriage relationship is a BALANCING relationship. As soon as the spouses stop being active relationship managers and balancing the small imbalances, they find that the small imbalances either flatten their closeness or set them up for big blow outs.

Therefore, because there are so many challenges and life changes that alter the responsibilities and roles of each spouse, it is a better plan to regularly evaluate, revise and balance how you as a couple share the

responsibilities in your home and family, rather than assuming that they never change. And in some careers (e.g. military) there are frequent times of separation and reunification that require this re-alignment of responsibilities and mutual reliance. This is why we like to say that a healthy relationship is not a “balanced” relationship but a “balancing” relationship.

The concept of achieving some “balance” in your relationship that then lasts the rest of your life is unrealistic and will set you up for conflicts and missed opportunities to step in and support each other. However, an attitude that you two are regularly “balancing” your relationship keeps you open to change and new needs that may have emerged in your relationship.



Let me ask you the discussion question from the workbook:



**“DISCUSSION QUESTION”**

*Since two people will always have some differences, then what is the golden rule for partners?*

You have probably heard of the Golden Rule: who knows what the golden rule is? Wait until someone in the class recites, “Do unto others as you would have others do unto you.” However, we are going to revise this rule for our third session to make sure that it is absolutely clear... because you might think that this means that you should do for your partner what you like your partner to do for you—you like to go biking so you buy your partner a bike (but your partner hates biking). Or you like a particular band so you surprise your partner with concert tickets (because that is what you would like your partner to do for you). It may be a bit of semantics, but the golden rule of marriage should sound more like, *Do unto your other as your OTHER needs.*”

You cannot love your partner in the way(s) that you want your partner to love you... you have to love your partner according to the way(s) that your partner would like to be loved. It would be easy to love a partner in the same way you want to be loved. This would come natural.

If you like to hug and show affection, then it would most likely be easy for you to do the same for your partner. If you liked to talk, then it would be easy to engage in talking with your partner, as if that is what would also make them feel that their needs were met.

In fact, you would not even have to really know your partner very well to meet their needs because you would just be doing for them what you like to have done for you, and you know what you would like to have done for you without ever discussing it with your partner!

But the reality of true love is that for it to be successful it requires that you get out of your own world and into the world of your partner. Therefore, loving your partner makes you have to first *know* your partner!

This is why the RAM has know... then trust...then rely—because you must first know your partner and his or her needs and also hold a good attitude (trust-picture) before you can accurately satisfy those needs.

This can be summarized in a simple statement: become the connoisseur of your partner.

A connoisseur is an expert... like an expert of fine wine. They know everything there is to know about wine... they can just take a sniff and they can tell you how old the wine is, what vineyard the grapes were grown, who manufactured the wine... BUT a connoisseur is NOT JUST an EXPERT, they LOVE WINE...

You need to be an expert on what meets the needs of your spouse, and LOVE IT!!

I would like to have couples take five minutes and privately discuss the two questions in their workbooks. After they are done, I will ask for some volunteers to share with the large class what you came up with.

What is important for you to gain from your discussion is the fact that you will most likely have similar *and* different wants/needs, and it will take thought and intention to understand and meet those unique needs.

Also be aware that there are some people who are sensitive to the language used in discussions like this. One person likes the word “needs” while another does not. Usually, the conflict is not over the concept but rather the meaning that they bring to the particular word. The one who was turned off to the word “needs” may be just fine with the word “wants.”



**“DISCUSSION QUESTION”** *It is important to be your spouse’s connoisseur, so what are some similarities and differences between what you and your spouse need and want?*



**“DISCUSSION QUESTION”** *What are some ways that you can keep a good attitude toward these differences and make sure that they compliment your relationship rather than become a source of annoyance?* For some couples, they struggle to find a way to blend their differences and they will need to work on this. Process their ideas in a large group by



asking for couples to share what they came up with. You can then explain:

*After having the couples discuss their differences and how to blend them together in more effective ways, you can process this by asking the entire class if any of them have become really good at blending their differences in mutually satisfying and beneficial ways and would be willing to share some of the ways that they have come to blend their differences (success stories and role models).*

You can then explain:

**The best part of following the Golden Rule for marriage (“Do unto your spouse as your spouse needs”) is that it takes you out of your own comfort zone and makes you have to love and give selflessly. This means that you will not be able to love your partner without stretching yourself to both *understand* your partner AND *grow to give* to him/her in ways that may be very different than what is natural to you. It is often said that you cannot change another person. However, the love you have for your partner should prompt changes *in you*. Herein is the key to understanding why husbands and wives are different, with different needs and desires:**

**MARRIAGE IS DESIGNED TO MAKE EACH SPOUSE MORE THAN WHAT THEY WOULD BE ON THEIR OWN.**

**Giving to your partner’s unique needs actually becomes a gain to you. Compatibility is not just finding someone similar to you. Your differences must be blended together in mutually satisfying ways so that you and your partner complement each other. Those differences that irritate can really become a benefit to you and your overall relationship.**

**SIMILARITIES provide a basis of common interests, values and personality traits.**

**DIFFERENCES provide fulfillment for where each of you is lacking. This is why opposites often attract. It is your differences that make you more than what you would ever have been on your own. The art of marriage is learning how to blend these differences in positive, respectful and gainful ways. The basic philosophy of marriage is that two partners are committed to meeting the unique needs and desires of each other, resulting in a union that makes both of them better than they would be on their own. Giving to your partner’s needs and wants, then is paradoxical. That is: you give, you gain. Both partners approaching each other with this philosophy can hardly go wrong.**

## D. DESCRIPTION OF THE TOP TEN INTIMACY ACTIVITIES

 35 minutes



### ACTIVITY: TOP TEN LISTS

This is a fun way to get the class to explore the most important needs of husbands and wives. Let the class know that they are going to generate two TOP TEN LISTS, one of what men want from their partners; and the other of what women most want from their partners. Then, divide the class into two groups—the men in one group and the women in the other. Then ask the men to come up with the *top ten list of what women want/need from their partners*, and the women must come up with *the top ten list of what men want/need from their*

*partners*. The goal is to have men and women think “out of the box.” When you are a connoisseur of someone, then you have to think about and see everything from their perspective, not your own. So, this is an exercise of thinking from the opposite sex’s perspective. Have them go off with their groups. They should brainstorm all of the wants and needs that they can think of. Then organize from the least to most important (#1 is most important). Provide each group with a flip chart paper that they can use to write out their lists.

When they come back together then have them present the top ten lists. Strongly make the following rules. **When the women come up to present their top ten list of what men want then I want all of the men to “show them your love” by clapping and shouting. And women, when it is the men’s time then I expect you to make some noise too. After each group presents, the others will choose specific things that they appreciate and like about the list. There will be NO NEGATIVE comments; no one is allowed to say, “I like number four BUT I just wish it was number three...” ONLY POSITIVES.**

After gathering the presentations you can state, **It has become clear that both men and women seem to have a fairly decent understanding of what the other wants and needs from a relationship! So, our conclusion is that NOW YOU ARE WITHOUT EXCUSE! The challenge may be how to fulfill this, but you can see that most of you have a general understanding of your partner and his/her differences. You can also see that there are some overlaps of**

similarities with these differences. And yet, a successful marriage relationship requires that you become an expert on your partner and their unique needs and wants... a connoisseur, if you will, of your partner.

Each of you will have an opportunity to make your own personal top ten list a little later in this session! When the presentations are completed you can hang them on the wall (YOU WILL ASK COUPLES TO PERSONALIZE THEM IN THE NEXT SECTION AND MAKE THEIR OWN TOP TEN LISTS).

## Ten Intimacy Activities to Add to Your Top Ten List



There have been various authors who have conceptualized ways to understand the differences between spouses- those who suggest that people come from different planets, or that each partner should figure out his or her own love style, or that you need to know your specific personality temperament and

how your code interacts with your spouse. All of these approaches have some benefit to marriages, but the bottom line is that both partners need to know their partner's needs and desires, and be committed to working to meet those needs to the best of their ability.

The reality is that over time we all experience changes that create new needs and desires in our relationship. In your twenties you may have really wanted a lot of words of affirmation, and then in your thirties you may be living to get projects done, and then in your fifties you might look forward to more recreational and unstructured time together. No one says that your needs are not allowed to change. But two partners committed to understanding and meeting each others' needs find that they have to make adjustments over time because of these changes.

You may need to review each of these ten types of activity in order to make sure that the class understands them in the same way.

In order to avoid any misconception, let me give you a brief explanation of each activity.



**Romance:** Often activities which are aesthetically pleasing (prompt an appreciation of beauty)- like a walk in the woods, or watching the stars, or listening to music- these activities are most associated with romance.

**Affection and Nurturing:** Some want affectionate touch, while others want affectionate words. Nurturing interactions are often more than just touch or words, they include caretaking behaviors and helpfulness.

**Mental Stimulation:** This would involve any type of activity in which learning or ideas are stimulated- reading a book together, or listening to a workshop or seminar.

**Social Activities:** This includes activities involving friends and family.

**Projects and Tasks:** This involves activities which are done together and separately, but which are focused on some task or project.

**Openness in Communication:** This is both structured communication (e.g. a planned time to talk) and spontaneous talks. It also involves the degree of openness that is experienced during these conversations.

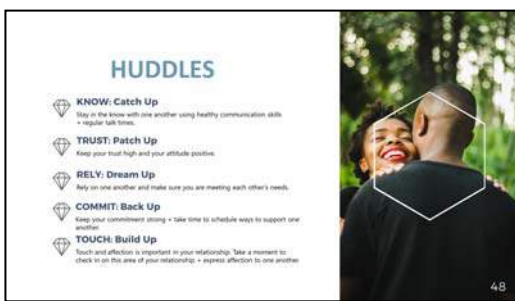
**Unstructured Time Together:** This is time together when there is no specific event or plan. An example of this would be a Saturday when both partners are together without any specific plans- so they sit on the deck and talk, read etc.

**Spiritual Activities and Closeness:** This includes things like attending a place of worship, saying a prayer together, engaging in meditation or other spiritual activities, talking about spiritual things, reading devotionals or spiritual writings.

**Entertainment and Recreation:** This includes watching or attending something recreational or entertaining, as well as participating in some activity that has these qualities.

**Sexual Relationship:** Session Five addresses this topic in more detail as it is a strong source of bonding and closeness in a marriage relationship. It needs to be talked about regularly, and couples should make sure that they are understanding the needs and desires in this area so that they work together to meet each other's expectations.

## E. STEP THREE Dream Up (RELY) 15 minutes



I want to briefly describe each of the steps of the Huddle. Essentially, you have done the first two steps during Sessions One and Two. In this Session, you will create a resource to use in the third step of a Huddle by generating your own personal Top Ten Lists. But first, let

me describe all five steps of the Huddle .

Have the class turn to the white page of the Workbook that describes the Five Steps of a Huddle. You can read the short paragraph (not the sub-points) next to each step or use the descriptions below.

### **HUDDLES**

**STEP ONE: KNOW (Catch Up):** Review **WHAT** you have been talking about or need to discuss and **HOW** you have been talking. Couples need to keep in touch with each other with regular talk times.

**STEP TWO: TRUST (Patch Up):** Focus on the positives in your partner, keeping a good attitude, and **TELLING** your partner what you appreciate about who your partner is and what he/she has done for you since your last huddle (making sure to clean out any negative thoughts or hurt feelings in order to affirm your trust and respect). These first two steps are a look back while the next three steps look forward.

**STEP THREE: RELY (Dream Up):** Now you are naturally in a good position to want to meet your partner's needs and interests. This is where your **PERSONAL TOP TEN LISTS** will help. Review your relationship since your last huddle and talk about what you did and how happy you were with your relationship over that time. Also discuss what you would like to do differently before your next huddle. **ASSUME** that there is something lacking. Be sure to approach this in a positive way and without fault-finding. Write out specific ideas of what you would like to do together before your next Huddle.

**STEP FOUR: COMMIT (Back Up):** This includes making a firm commitment to follow through on what you determine you want and need to do. But it also means that you look at each other's calendars for the upcoming week or two and discuss ways you can "back up" each other in supportive ways.

**STEP FIVE: TOUCH (Build Up):** This is a great way to end your huddle... by expressing your love and affection in words and actions. Even though your physical and sexual relationship may be part of your top ten lists, it is such a vital area in your relationship that it important to have this additional focus on how you are doing together and how each of you feel about your affection, romance and sexual intimacy.

### **ACTIVITY: PERSONALIZE THE TOP TEN LISTS**

*Ask the couples to walk over to the lists hanging on the walls, look at them, take pictures, and discuss as a couple what they would want to revise (if anything) to personalize the lists. They can use the following two questions in their workbook to write down some goals from these lists. Ask the couples if their most common conflicts or misunderstandings reflect any of the needs on*

*their top ten lists. Most likely it will. You can make the point that many conflicts are because something you want/need is not being met. The argument may be about something on the surface, but below the surface are some of the unmet needs that they listed.*

As you work on your top ten list, incorporate the following discussion questions. You can use the charts in the workbook to make your top ten list, and to help answer the discussion questions. These questions and charts are also beneficial to use during your Step Three in future Huddles to evaluate your relationship.



**"DISCUSSION QUESTION"** *What are some of the activities you find that you sometimes lose track of or neglect in your relationship?* *Ideas:* Because couples are so busy and life is so fast paced, it is important that they take the time to discuss where they are lacking or not having their relational needs met and how they can realign their relationship and schedule to fulfill these needs.



**"DISCUSSION QUESTION"** *What are two or three activities that you think are the most important to plan to do in your relationship?* *Ideas:* The activities that are the most important will most likely reflect the deeper needs/desires that the couples talked about in the previous section of this session. Help them to connect the activities with what makes them feel connected, close and loved.

<b>Activities</b>	<b>Since Last Huddle</b>	<b>Before Next Huddle</b>
Romance		
Affection		
Mental		
Social		
Projects		
Openness		
Unstructured Time		
Spiritual		
Entertainment		
Sexual		

When couples have completed making their top ten lists, you can close this session by a quick review: **It is so important to have regular huddles in order to keep balancing your relationship in the five dynamics of the RAM. Remember the foundational principles of this course: It is normal to fall out of balance (life will naturally do this to you). But the danger is that you stay out of balance. And regularly balancing your imbalances is a sure guarantee that you will avoid the slow leaks that can lead to big blowouts in any marriage or relationship.**



**“DEEP THOUGHT”** *Marriage is an alliance entered into by a man who can't sleep with the window shut, and a woman who can't sleep with the window open.* George Bernard Shaw

## INSTRUCTOR EVALUATION FORM FOR SESSION THREE

Rate your accomplishment of the lesson goals on a 1 to 5 scale.

**1 Not taught**

**2 Very difficult to teach this point**

**3 Somewhat difficult to teach this point**

**4 Somewhat easy to teach this point**

**5 Very easy to teach this point**

### Goals

- Gain an importance of meeting your spouse's unique needs and wants.
- Develop the belief that mutual need fulfillment will strengthen the bond of marriage and deepen the character of each spouse.
- Find agreement on the roles and division of responsibilities in your marriage and family.
- Establish a regular plan for handling your finances in mutually agreeable ways.
- OPTIONAL: Review the "family templates" that you brought into your marriage and family from your experiences growing up.
- Form a plan to regularly take inventory of the changing needs in your marriage.
- Learn the ten top activities that foster intimacy in the togetherness of a marriage relationship.

**Lesson-At-a-Glance** Total Class Time \_\_\_\_\_

Section	Suggested Time	Actual Time
A. The Qualities of Reliance	15 minutes	_____
B. The Actions of Reliance	40 minutes	_____
C. Keeping Your Relationship A Priority	15 minutes	_____

D. Description of the Top Ten Intimacy Activities	35 minutes	_____
Step Three: RELY (Dream Up)	15 minutes	_____

## OVERVIEW OF SESSION FOUR

Commitment is explained and applied to practical, day-to-day living. The heart of commitment refers to the way you belong to each other in the relationship and carry your partner in your heart. Commitment also produces a resiliency in the marriage that strengthens a couple's ability to cope with stress, life challenges, losses and unavoidable separations. Finally, commitment is more than a vow made those many years ago... it is a daily promise to grow in love.

### Goals

1. Deepen one's understanding of the heart of commitment.
2. Learn a practical definition of commitment and the way that it increases resiliency in a marriage relationship.
3. Gain insight into the stages of change/separation and how your commitment can help you successfully work through challenges in mutually beneficial ways.
4. Develop a practical approach to turning promises into experiences.

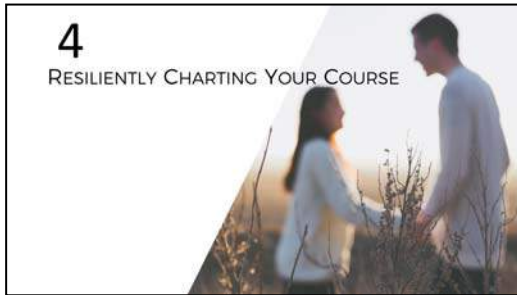
### Lesson-At-a-Glance

A. Being Secure With Belonging To Your Partner	40 minutes
B. Becoming Stronger From The Times Of Testing	60 minutes
C. Putting Your Commitment Into Action	10 minutes
STEP FOUR Set Your Dates	10 minutes

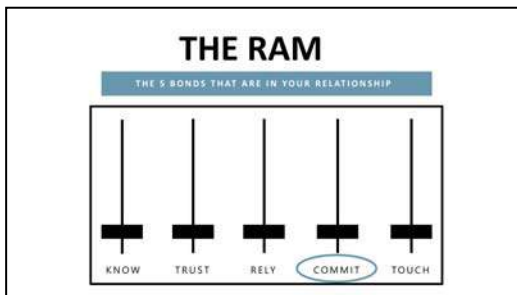
### Material Checklist

Use the Relationship Attachment Model® (RAM) display board. This hands-on teaching tool represents the core of this curriculum and is an excellent visual aid. You must use the LINKS workbooks (several versions available for ordering through [www.lovethinks.com](http://www.lovethinks.com)). Each workbook comes with a mini-RAM. It is beneficial to have one workbook per individual in the class. You will also need to have a dry erase board or a flip chart (preferably) to write additional notes. The paper notes can be taped on the walls to provide further visual aids to the accumulating material. A power point projector and screen is needed. The lesson plans provide the outline and structure for each session and are printed throughout the lesson plans. They also match the LINKS workbooks for participants.

**SESSION FOUR**  
**RESILIENTLY CHARTING YOUR COURSE**



were to work on prior to this session.



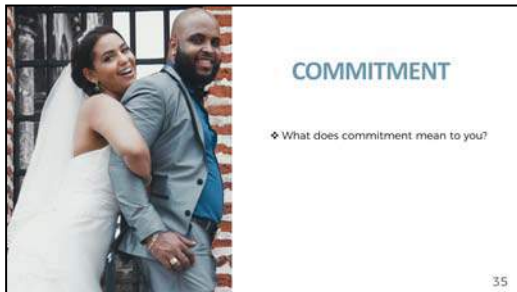
Make reference to the RAM board as you begin the class and explain: **Up to this point we have seen the importance of keeping up with knowing each other, keeping a good attitude, dealing with conflict and any major challenges to your trust and respect, and finding mutually satisfying ways to work together and meet each other’s needs and wants! This session looks at the importance of your commitment—and when life has a way of dropping your closeness represented by any of the levels of the RAM, then it is your commitment that moves into the forefront! You could say that commitment is the lead dog that drives the sled of your marriage through the deep valleys of difficulty and change.**

You should have this slide on the screen as the participants enter and take their seats. You should interact with the participants about if they have had any huddles and what are the highlights from the three previous sessions and any discussion questions or activities that they

Make reference to the RAM board as you begin the class and explain: **Up to this point we have seen the importance of keeping up with knowing each other, keeping a good attitude, dealing with conflict and any major challenges to your trust and respect, and finding mutually**

**A. Being Secure With Belonging To Your Partner**

**40 minutes**



are used to convey the idea of commitment.



**"DISCUSSION QUESTION"** *What does commitment mean to you?* Ideas: **How would you define commitment? What exactly is commitment? Let’s write down all the words that are related to or describe the concept of commitment.**

Write on the flip chart all of the words that



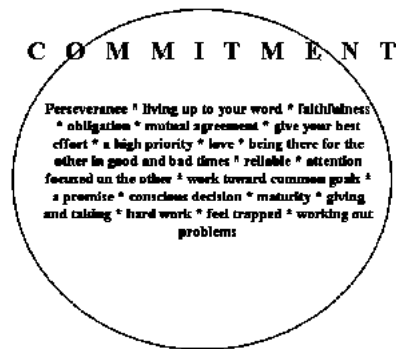
**"DISCUSSION QUESTION"** *How many of the words about commitment also apply to love?* Ideas: Refer to your flip chart and go through the words they

generated and ask if they are qualities of commitment or love... or both. This builds an understanding of how “love” is imbedded in the concept of commitment, and how true commitment involves acts of love!

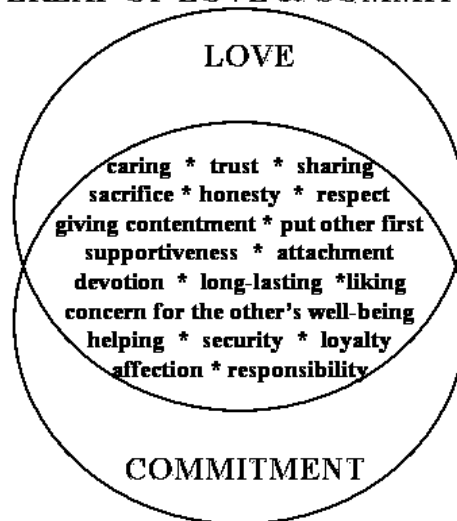
You can then explain:

There was a study that looked at the words that people use for love and commitment. Look at the words we have listed. How many of them also seem to describe love? [Fehr, B. (1988). Prototype analysis of the concepts of love and commitment. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 55(4), 557-579].

What the researchers found is that about 2/3s of the words used for commitment were also used as synonyms for love. These graphics show many of the words used by participants in that study that were associated with love; words that were associated with commitment; and words that were used for both love and commitment.



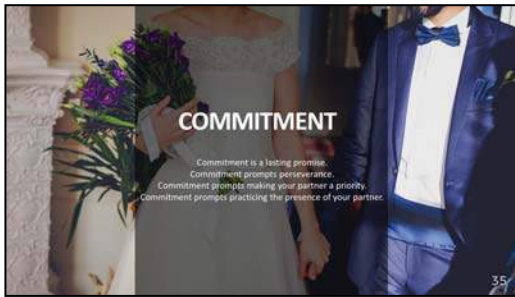
**OVERLAP OF LOVE & COMMITMENT**





love you” - because those words also portray a level of commitment and investment in the other.

What the researcher found is that love and commitment are very similar concepts- that when you say you love someone, to that same degree you will be expected to commit to them. This is why many people start to feel alone when they do not hear their partner ever say, “I

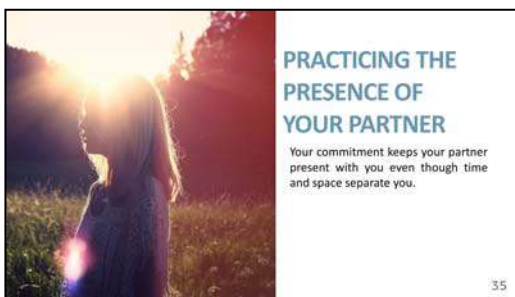


an identity of belonging that comes with a commitment.

So what is commitment?

Obviously commitment has a complex meaning and overlaps a lot with love. Allow a moment for reflection. But commitment involves a depth of belonging... ways you *belong to your partner and your partner to you*. There is

True commitment is a vow or lasting promise that creates this identity of belonging; true commitment, then produces perseverance through difficult times; and it prompts resetting priorities in order to keep important your partner; and commitment prompts a presence of togetherness even when separated.



you in my heart.”

You might say that commitment is *practicing of the presence of your partner*.

Let me begin with this way that commitment causes you to carry your partner with you in your heart. True commitment surpasses time and space so that even when you are apart, you are still together. Commitment is the unwavering belief that...“neither time nor space can separate us because I carry

There are so movies that depict the heart of commitment. One example was provided in the classic movie, Forrest Gump. You could say that this scene portrays “commitment according to Forrest Gump.” It was when Jenny was on her death bed and she asked Forrest if he was afraid while he was deployed in Vietnam. He said yes at first, but then started talking about how beautiful it was when it was raining for weeks and then in a moment it stopped, the clouds parted and the moon shone through. As he talked the film he continued to replay

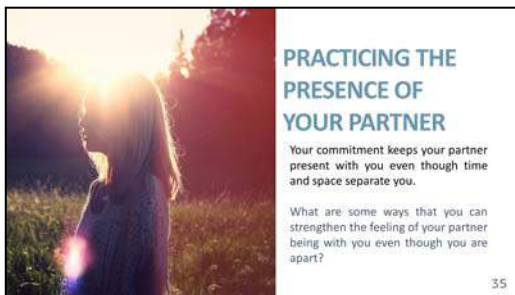
some of his experiences of beauty from that time until the present... like when he was running in the desert and he couldn't tell where the horizon ended and the sky began... or when he was on the Bayou and the sun was setting casting millions of sparkles on the ocean... or the lake that was so clear that its reflection of the mountains could not be distinguished from reality. Jenny listened intently and then reflected, "I wish that I had been with you." Forrest looked in her eyes and said, "You were, Jenny, you were." That comment signified the bond that he had with her- no matter where he was or what he was doing, she was with him. He carried her in his heart. This is the *spirit of commitment*.

Refer to the RAM board and move the slider up as you explain the levels of commitment. **The lowest level of commitment has the lowest level of belonging. When you think of a couple who has a strong commitment then their sense of belonging to each other is very intense. However, when a couple has a drop in their commitment then they feel less overlap in their life together... more independent and disconnected.**

**When two people are married, their loyalty, obligation and sacrifice of commitment flow from this central feature of belonging to each other. In fact, this mutual interdependence is at the heart of many marital vows: *that the two shall leave their father and mother and cleave to each other; and the two shall become one.***

You can use the analogy of commitment to one's country. This depth of commitment is expressed when someone is willing to give up their life for their country. This self-sacrificing commitment comes from belonging to their motherland, from believing that they are inseparably connected to their country, and that they will ultimately live for the good and protection of their land.

**This sense of *belonging to each other and carrying your partner in your heart* produces the feeling of security in a relationship. When you trust your partner more deeply, it leads to mutual reliance, which leads to a deeper overlap, a stronger closeness and a feeling of always being close to your partner. These feelings of connection enhance a security in your relationship so that you are confident that your partner is thinking of you even though you are separated.**



**This exercise should be done by the couples in the following way:** Have partners share with each other and their table group ways that they cultivate this *spirit of togetherness even when apart*. Each couple would take turns and speak to their partner and those at the table to share

what are some reminders, or thoughts, or habits/rituals, or any practices that

they do to keep their partner close when apart. If couples are military, you can ask this specifically about how they stayed connected when deployed or other times of separation.



**"DISCUSSION QUESTION"** *What are some ways that you can strengthen that feeling of your spouse being with you even though you are apart?*

This question expands the activity of what they are *already* doing to what *more* they can do... and it is especially relevant for individuals who are away from home frequently for their job. However, all couples need to practice this. You may find that you never tell your partner the times you think or are reminded of something about him/her—a special song, a time together, a location or just a small characteristic. But these little thoughts and reminders are the way that you “carry your partner in your heart” and “practice the presence of your partner.” While maintaining a strong sense of closeness when apart may be difficult, the many forms of communication and advancements in technology make staying in touch and feeling connected easier than ever. In addition, couples should take time out to discuss or prepare for the times they are apart and make sure they have expressed their expectations of communication and how they can maintain their closeness.

### **ACTIVITY: HOLDING YOUR SPOUSE IN YOUR HEART**

The heart of commitment is found in taking your partner with you in all you do... even though time and space separate you; the depth of your commitment keeps him/her close.

1. Practice taking short breaks in the day and think about your partner. Reflect on a good memory, a recent enjoyable or tender time, things that you love about your partner, or ways that your partner loves and cares for you. If you have a personal faith, then say a prayer for your partner... give thanks and ask for ways that you can let your partner know how much he/she means to you. Write down some examples of things about your partner that you would be able to reflect on through the day.
2. Tell your partner what you missed about him/her today. This doesn't have to be anything major or greatly significant. But letting your partner know that you were thinking about him/her at different times through the day while you were apart deepens the security of knowing that you carry your partner in your heart. List some examples of when you think about your partner when you are not together, and what typical things occur in your day that makes you think of him/her.

**CLASS PROCESS:** When they are done, you can again ask different table members to stand and share something that one of the couples at their table said about practicing the presence of their partner and keeping that partner in their

heart. Similar to the suggested way to process the activity in Session Two of expressing appreciation, this helps build group cohesion, practices the communication skill of active listening and restatements, and provides role models for the other couples.

## B. Becoming Stronger From the Times of Testing

 60 minutes



Commitment needs to be the lead dog on the sled of your marriage... because commitment generates resiliency. Resiliency is the ability to bounce back when hurt or challenged; adapt when facing change; cope when experiencing a trial or loss; and bend when thrown a curve. Resiliency is an

essential quality in keeping a marriage together over the course of life.

COMMITMENT PRODUCES THE PERSEVERANCE THROUGH THE TURBULENT TIMES THAT DEVELOPS A RESILIENT SPIRIT AND A RESILIENT MARRIAGE.



Think of the five bonds of a relationship that are depicted in the RAM like five dogs that pull a dog sled. Only one of them can be the “lead

dog”—you know, the one that sets the direction they will go; the one that motivates all of the others when they are fatigued; the one that just won’t quit. Breeders are always looking for that special dog that has what is needed to become a lead dog. It is said that a lead dog will not stop running even when tired. In fact, there are stories of lead dogs that ran until their hearts burst in their chests.

There might have been a time when families or society demanded that commitment be the lead dog of marriage. But divorce is so accepted now that it is up to each individual in a relationship to consciously choose what will be the lead dog of their relationship... the driver of their relationship when challenging times occur; the conductor of their relationship that keeps everything together when the world is pulling couples apart.

This develops the resilient spirit that keeps the marriage from sinking as it moves through times of turbulent waters. Or you could say that when the terrain is rough, commitment becomes the lead dog pulling the sled of your

**marriage up the hills and over the challenges.**

**In the same way, COMMITMENT IS EXERCISED BY TIMES OF TESTING so that the feeling of belonging together can actually be deepened when these times are worked through in healthy ways.**

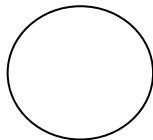
### A Model of Resiliency



This model of resiliency captures the stages that you want to help couples to understand and move through when they are facing challenges, crises and required separations/deployments. Each stage is described with a “psychological term” and a “common term.” It all starts with the cohesion of the marriage (or the routine of your marriage).

It is suggested that you move through this explanation fairly quickly in order to assign small group discussion that looks for ways couples have applied these principles in their own relationships during challenging times.

Having A Routine



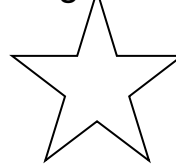
Cohesion

A Time Of Testing



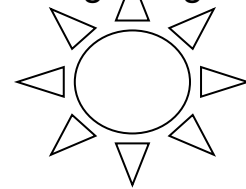
Destabilization

Getting It Together



Mobilization

Making New Beginnings



Adaptation



**Stage One: Cohesion** No matter what your marriage is like—good, bad, or indifferent—it has a routine with a built-in resistance to change.

It is common for a marriage relationship to develop routines. We discussed the routine of where you talk together in session one. These routines may be healthy or unhealthy. But once established, they are difficult to change. Therefore, the cohesion of your marriage relationship works for you when it is holding together positive routines. However, it can work against you when it is keeping you in some

imbalance or harmful way of relating.



## Stage Two: Destabilization

From this standpoint, crises, changes and required separations (times of testing) shake up the cohesion of a relationship creating the opportunity to adjust and improve the patterns of relating. Yes, every relationship is in a vulnerable state during the destabilization of a

challenging time, but your relationship is ALSO in an opportunistic state to make positive changes for personal, marital and family growth.

It is true that we often live with some little imbalance in our relationship because we are comfortable with our routine. And then when our routine is disrupted, the pain of staying the same rises to the surface and becomes greater than the pain and hassle of change (because we are already changing). This is how disruptions and destabilizations become opportunities for positive change and growth!



**”DIG DEEPER”** Having the ability to adjust and adapt to destabilizing times requires a certain attitude or mindset. There is one primary belief that seems to be crucial to empowering an individual and a couple in successfully navigating through the waters of a storm.

There is one major precipitating attitude that is essential to successfully facing the stage of destabilization.

This is the attitude that the *MEANING of life events are NOT automatically fixed*, but rather, your individual perspective has a lot to do with determining the meaning.

You could word it like this: You do not live with the events of your life but rather with the story you tell yourself about the events of your life. Successful individuals and couples look at the events of their life through a lens that sees the good and minimizes the bad. You could refer to this as a redemptive outlook of life. Redemption is **THE ABILITY TO FIND VALUE IN SOMETHING OF LITTLE TO NO VALUE**, or something actually detrimental.

Facing loss begins with this attitude that good does not just come from good... good can come out of bad. This does not mean that you are naïve or that you deny the bad. Rather, as time continues, you see that the bad event may actually be a part of a bigger picture that has some value or benefit. The bad may be a trying time, a grievous loss, or a grueling challenge. But approaching these destabilizing crises with a hopeful and redemptive outlook

will usually change the ending in positive ways.

Another example that we can use is to compare life challenges to the experience of a military deployment. Military deployments have many of the same ingredients as civilian crises and significant changes. A deployment is an extended period of time when an individual is taken out of the normal routine of life and placed in a temporary life setting that has challenges and often dangers. This impacts married couples by putting them in a different state of their relationship during the deployment.

Obviously, there are military deployments... but there are also “deployments of life.” Every person, at one time or another, will be deployed by some life event—work separations, illnesses, major changes and personal crises alter the levels of the dynamic bonds of the RAM just like a military deployment.

It is crucial that there is a strong commitment so that each partner feels close to their spouse during the “deployment.” It is important to feel that you “take your partner with you” whenever you are apart. This “connection” is the heart of a commitment and provides the feeling of security in a relationship, especially when there is an extended “time of testing.”



**Stage Three: Mobilization** It is essential to mobilize (or *get it together*) during times of change and transition. Look to three resources.

1. Personal Resources
2. Relational Resources
3. Community/Social Resources

### Mobilization Resources

- Personal Resources
- Relational Resources
- Community Resources



**“DISCUSSION QUESTION”** *What are some personal, relational or community resources that you draw upon to mobilize during times of stress and change?* Ideas: Ask the couples in your large discussion what resources they have found beneficial in mobilizing during any previous (or present) challenging times or changes.

Examples. **Personal** would include things like an optimistic attitude, a

personal faith, exercise, etc. **Relational** would include friends, family, church or a faith community where you have contacts, business friends, etc. **Community** resources would include support networks, counseling, faith community leaders, mentors, groups, etc.



**”DIG DEEPER”** One of the most challenging lifestyles is the career military life. This has become even more relevant with the continued wars over seas. There may be some others that parallel this “culture” but it has its unique challenges. Military deployments create an altered state of marriage that begins to feel normal because they continue for so long. In a similar way as mentioned above, there are “deployments of life” that alter the love bonds of the RAM for a long period of time. Examples of life’s deployments are the illness of a spouse, a life-changing accident, the loss of a family member, the birth of a child, mental illness, change of job and residence, etc. These changes require that a couple practice their commitment and move through the stages of mobilizing and creating a new and positive routine together.

The following letter is one veteran military spouse’s advice to a very young military spouse. This can certainly apply to the husband of a military spouse, and there should be similar advice for the military husband or wife who needs to attend to the needs of the marriage and family. It is not just up to the spouse to understand and support, it is essential that the one in the service understand and support his/her spouse. As previously stated, this is an example of one lifestyle that can provide insight for many other life deployments that challenge marriages. As many have experienced, mastering one of life’s deployments equips you for the next.

This long letter specifically applies to those with military experiences. However, there are many principles that apply to any “deployment of life” and the ways to mobilize and keep a good attitude.

If you are working with military class, you can read this letter out loud and have the class make notes about the specific suggestions that this Mother gave to a younger wife of a soldier husband. Then ask how these suggestions would apply in their lives and even in civilian settings with different deployments of life.

Because it is long, you can also copy and print this letter for your class and ask them to talk about it as a homework project.

“I have a son that served in the Army for two years after high school. My husband also retired from the Army about almost two years ago. My father was retired Navy, so I have some experience with military life and how to cope.

Spouses need to be helped to understand the military way of life better. Years ago, they used to “require” spouses to attend “coffees” and support

meetings. The older wives truly did help teach the younger ones how to be a supportive and have a good attitude. At least I had good mentors. It helps getting involved in a unit's support group so you can learn about the military way of life, benefits, etc. from the other spouses. Today, it seems to be more optional for spouses to attend these meetings.

I can tell that you have what it takes to be a great military wife. It takes a positive attitude and a huge heart of understanding. Believe me, your husband will think you are the GREATEST woman in the entire world if you don't come down on him about his career choice to be in the military. If you are open to change and have a will to live an adventurous life, you will be absolutely shocked at what God will bring your way. Gradual changes in your attitude...just "deciding" not to put down the military is a huge step of progress. Little by little with a right attitude you will find that you will have some great benefits. Use the resources of the military. The commissary will save you at least 25% off your food bill. Some bases require you to show your ID card when you enter the commissary, most all definitely require it when you check out. If you write a check, ask them what information they want on the check. Each base/post is different.

Your medical care is some of the best in the country....and definitely at a fabulous price. Trust me. You get a housing allowance, 30 days paid vacation a year, and multiple travel opportunities. Try shooting for that in the private sector.

There are all kinds of "free" services or reduced rate services available. Contact the MWR office on post/base and ask about free classes, events, tours, etc. There are free legal services at the JAG office. Contact base information and they will give you the number...or check out your base web site.

ALSO...when your husband is assigned to a new location, there should be a "sponsor" assigned to him. Call that sponsor and get advice from them. This is how it should work...like a Buddy system. We've had great sponsors and 'non' sponsors that just said, "Call me if you need something." Sure thing. I always tried to take the lead on helping the wife and family settle in, especially when we were over seas. We'd pick them up at the airport, show them around, etc....invite them for dinner. Provide transportation until their vehicle shipped, etc.

When we had only been married a year and a half, we adopted a baby. The military adoption program covered our adoptions cost. Contact JAG to find out about it. My husband adopted my two bio children. The JAG office did all of the paperwork, I just had to file it at the local courthouse. When we were overseas, we adopted a six-year-old Korean daughter...now almost 13. After we adopted the baby, my husband was gone for the next 18 months overseas. I fully understand being alone with children and a new baby. I have sold nine homes, rented a few, and just built a new home. Every time we moved, we made great money when we sold. You just have to make sure you ask tons of

questions, so you don't lose your shirt financially. Have an enquiring mind: Everyone has some lesson they'll teach you about for free. Just ask them!

Please try to realize that at your age, when a lot of your friends are running around still playing like teenagers, you've moved on in life and have had to mature. You no longer have the luxury of "playing" around much. You have a family that depends on you. They need you in ways that you are not used to being needed, especially since you're still young yourself. Please, find a wise, older woman friend that you can lean on and seek counsel. Let them mentor you. They're out there.

Again, once you embrace the new changes in your life and sit back and just ask God to show you "how to be the wife and mother you long to be", believe me, He will. I know it. You'll soon find that the desires of your heart will start to grow and emerge and before you know it, people will be asking you for advice. I can tell you have what it takes. Just let that anger go and see who you are becoming. Change is hard, but it's also exciting and beautiful. Be blessed.

Sincerely...I am WiserNow

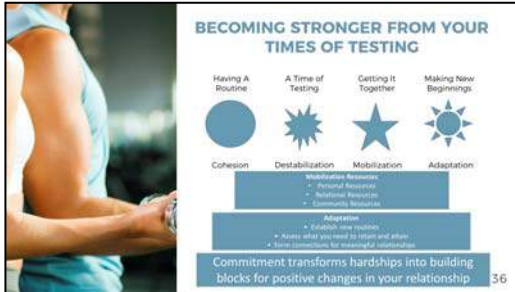


**Stage Four: Adaptation** It is essential that you embrace the changes that you are facing and use them to evaluate and alter any negative relationship patterns that were stuck in the past. This is the stage of **MAKING NEW BEGINNINGS**. This is your time to

make redemptive changes. The risk is that you will not put out the work to move your relationship ahead. Use the following three steps to help you positively adapt.

1. Establish new routines that preserves and promotes your core values. You need to anticipate what life will be like as you come out of the turbulent stage so that you can be intentional about your new routine. Be careful that you do not let the rush of life direct your choices... stay involved in implementing your values in your lifestyle.
2. Assess what you need to *attain* that is new, and what you want to *retain* from the old. This involves looking at your values and routine from the past. Discuss the unchangeable values that you want to reinsert into your new situation. Brainstorm ways that you will NOT lose those values about your relationship, your family, and other critical areas.
3. Form new connections that foster meaningful relationships. Think about your connections with each other—are there any that have developed a “slow leak?” Use the RAM as a guide for this. And no matter where life takes you as a couple, you need to have an umbrella of support and

friendships. It is very difficult to stay strong without the encouragement and involvement of others. “Friends sharpen friends like iron sharpens iron.”



So we are going to have you take some time at your tables and I would like at least one couple to share with your table group a mutually agreed-upon time in their relationship when they went through these different stages because of a challenging life experience. This needs

to be an experience that the couple can look back on and feel that they have been “successfully resilient.”

**Commitment transforms hardships into building blocks for positive changes in your relationship**



Have couples practice “catching your second wind” in the following way:

So like I said, at least one couple in your small group should share a challenging time in their relationship when they were able to mobilize, make positive changes and “bounce back” in positive ways.

Take a few minutes as couples to discuss this on your own first to make sure you are both comfortable sharing this experience. And I want to emphasize that this is an experience that you feel you were “successful” in how you handled it.

You should use the following steps listed in the exercise below and try to tie them into how you did them throughout your experience. You can also use the resiliency model to help guide the explanation of what you faced and how you dealt with it in resilient ways. If you have military couples who have been deployed in the past you may want to use deployments as the challenge you want them to discuss. Again, you are looking for “best practices” and successes of the couples.

Finally, let me clarify that I am not asking for stories of how you “perfectly” handled some situation. Many times during a stressful and challenging experience, we have initial reactions and perspectives that we have to work through and talk through. But as we progress, our feelings change and we revise our outlook, seeing positives that initially were

**completely out of sight. So this is normal. But I am hoping that you can share something that captures some of the action steps that lead us to be resilient as couples.**

You should be prepared to share a personal story if needed about either your own marital commitment pulling you through a difficult time and how you and your partner were able to be redemptive, or another couple that you know who successfully were resilient.

Essentially, the following discussion question along with the activity: Catching Your Second Wind is what are used for this small group work.



**"DISCUSSION QUESTION"** *Can you think of some examples of when commitment helps a marriage persevere through a time of testing?* *Ideas:* A common example of this is when married couples 'stay together for the kids' or when a couple seeks marital counseling or remains together after a break of trust. But there are also normal times when commitment is very important. *If you think your class needs ideas on challenging times you can remind the class of predictable times when a marriage becomes destabilized (e.g. move of residence, birth of child, empty nest, illnesses, etc.)—you made a similar list in session one but with a focus on the practice of commitment during times of testing. List these ideas on the board. This is similar to a list you generated during session one*

### ACTIVITY: CATCHING YOUR SECOND WIND

It is crucial to be able to work through difficult challenges. Commitment is both the source of this perseverance, as well as the bond that is exercised and strengthened as a result of the problems or hardships that you work through. Challenges create opportunities for growth. Review a situation that you are facing or have recently faced and work on each of these four steps.

1. ***Clean out your bad habits.*** First, identify important priorities in your relationship that have kept you close through difficult times. Then come up with at least one way that you have acted in the relationship that has weakened your bond and commitment. Promise to stop this bad habit and to replace it with something better.
2. ***Establish some new habits.*** Challenges disrupt your normal way of getting along. However, when a challenge or crisis settles down there is an opportunity to get into some new and better habits. You must be careful that you do not let the rush of life direct your choices. Determine one *new* way of practicing your commitment to your partner that will strengthen your relationship, especially during future difficult times.
3. ***Form new connections that foster meaningful relationships.*** No matter

where life takes you as a couple, you need to have an umbrella of support and friendships. It is very difficult to stay strong without the encouragement and involvement of others. “Friends sharpen friends like iron sharpens iron.” Make a plan for how you are going to improve your friendships and reach out more often to those who benefit your relationship.

4. *Find a positive way of looking at the hardships that you have worked through (or are still working through).* Identify one or two benefits that can come from this situation or difficult time. Look past the situation itself and find something positive that has come out of it. Discuss ways that you want to look back on the situation that has challenged your relationship. In many ways it is not the events which happen but the way you live with them that determines the story of your marriage.

## C. Putting Your Commitment Into Action 🔄 10 minutes



Commitment is more than a life-long pledge. It is a renewable contract, leading you to promise to fulfill the daily needs and desires of your partner. This is like the individual steps a marathon runner takes- the race is life-long, but each step is needed in order to run in the race. You can refer to these as “daily promises” –

those small but meaningful acts of commitment you do for your partner. Ask your couples to answer the two questions in the workbook about daily promises.



**“DISCUSSION QUESTION”** *What are some “daily promises” you make to your partner on a regular basis?* Ideas: These promises would include a task or favor your spouse wants, an activity your partner has been hoping for, a change in your routine, etc.



**“DISCUSSION QUESTION”** *What is one thing you can do to improve your success rate at fulfilling your “daily promises”?* Ideas: Mark it on your calendar, write yourself a note, make an appointment with your spouse, etc.

## STEP FOUR Back Up (COMMIT) 🔄 10 minutes

This fourth step in you Huddle is to look at how you are expressing your commitment to each other. Commitment has a very practical side.

**Commitment prompts you to review the activities of your life and find ways to prioritize your marriage. Commitment prompts you to support your partner in their responsibilities. This means that you will look at their schedule, not just yours, to determine ways that you can “back up” your spouse with the activities of their week.**

**As we saw in this session, commitment fosters a sense of belonging where you carry your partner in your heart... so that time and space do not separate you.**

**This step in your huddle makes commitment a very practical reality and keeps both of you actively involved in running your relationship.**

**Choose one of the questions from the workbook to talk about as a couple. Use these questions regularly in this step of your Huddle.**

**Here are some questions to use in this step of your huddle.**

What is one way this week that you felt I was there for you?

How did we keep each other present in our hearts and minds while we were apart?

What did I do that made you feel important to me?

What are some opportunities for me to support you in this next week?

What can I do or say to you this coming week that will make you feel important, a high priority, and valued?

You may want to also have your couples begin to write a relationship renewal commitment that you will have them read to each other at the end of Session Five. You would say:

**At the end of the next session, I will lead you in a commitment renewal ceremony. It will be simple, nothing elaborate. But to get ready for it, I would like you to write a brief renewal of your commitment to each other. Think of what you have learned and talked about throughout this course. Choose some of those things to put in our commitment.**

**You can use this incomplete sentence: From this time forward, I promise to \_\_\_\_\_. And be sure to include promising to more actively run your relationship with weekly huddles... for at least the next 3 months. If you do this then I am sure you will see the benefit of using the RAM for managing your relationship!**



**“DEEP THOUGHT”** *“Chains do not hold a marriage together. It is threads, hundreds of tiny threads which sew people together through the years.*

*Simone Signoret.”*

## INSTRUCTOR EVALUATION FORM FOR SESSION FOUR

Rate your accomplishment of the lesson goals on a 1 to 5 scale.

**1 Not taught**

**2 Very difficult to teach this point**

**3 Somewhat difficult to teach this point**

**4 Somewhat easy to teach this point**

**5 Very easy to teach this point**

### Goals

5. Deepen one's understanding of the heart of commitment.
6. Learn a practical definition of commitment and the way that it increases resiliency in a marriage relationship.
7. Gain insight into the stages of change/separation and how your commitment can help you successfully work through challenges in mutually beneficial ways.
8. Develop a practical approach to turning promises into experiences.

Deepen one's understanding of the heart of commitment.

Learn a practical definition of commitment and the way that it increases resiliency in a marriage relationship.

Gain insight into the stages of change/separation and how your commitment can help you successfully work through challenges in mutually beneficial ways.

Develop a practical approach to turning promises into experiences.

**Lesson-At-a-Glance** Total Class Time \_\_\_\_\_

Section	Suggested Time	Actual Time
A. Being Secure With Belonging	40 minutes	_____
B. Becoming Stronger From Testing	60 minutes	_____
C. Putting Your Commitment Into Action	10 minutes	_____
Step Four: COMMIT (Back Up)	10 minutes	_____

## OVERVIEW OF SESSION FIVE

Sexual intimacy is essential to the ongoing bond of closeness, attraction and vitality in marriage. This session explains the differences between romance, sexual drives and arousal. Learn ways to make your differences work together to keep your love and lovemaking alive. It concludes with a review of the importance of having regular huddles in order to keep your relationship close and growing.

### Goals

1. To understand sex drives and how they may vary between partners.
2. To understand and discuss ways that affection and sexual touch is expressed in your relationship.
3. To understand differences between sex drives and levels of arousal.
4. To improve romance in your relationship and understand ways romance relates with your sexual relationship.
5. To explore the emotional aspects of your physical and sexual relationship.

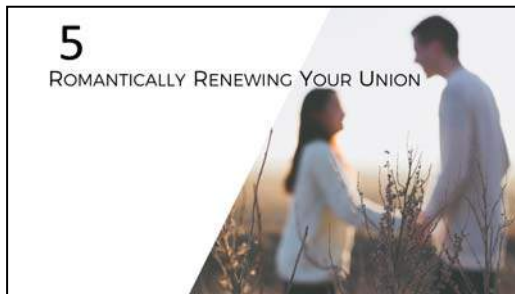
### Lesson-At-a-Glance

A. What is Your Sex Drive?	20 minutes
B. What Turns You On?	30 minutes
C. How Do You Spell Romance	40 minutes
D. Is Sex Physical or Emotional?	20 minutes
E. Good Sex: A Meeting of the Minds (and Bodies)	10 minutes

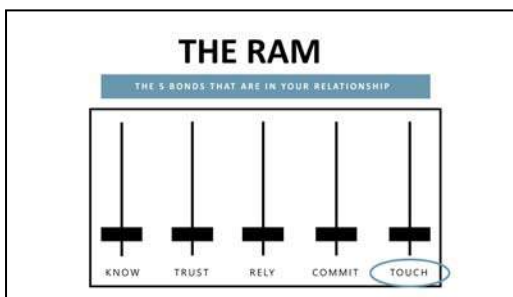
### Material Checklist

Use the Relationship Attachment Model® (RAM) display board. This hands-on teaching tool represents the core of this curriculum and is an excellent visual aid. You must use the LINKS workbooks (several versions available for ordering through [www.nojerks.com](http://www.nojerks.com)). Each workbook comes with a mini-RAM. It is beneficial to have one workbook per individual in the class. You will also need to have a dry erase board or a paper (preferably) to write additional notes. The paper notes can be taped on the walls to provide further visual aids to the accumulating material. A power point projector and screen is needed. The lesson plans provide the outline and structure for each session and are printed throughout the lesson plans. They also match the LINKS workbooks for participants.

## SESSION FIVE ROMANTICALLY RENEWING YOUR UNION

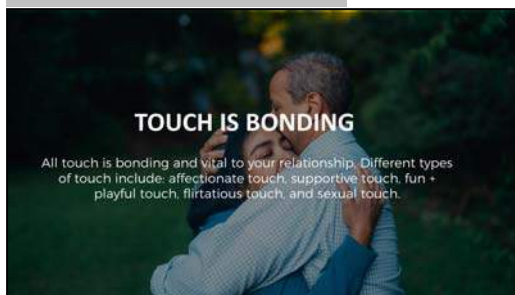


Have this slide on the screen as participants come in and sit down. Review the first four sessions by talking through the RAM. You can humorously tease them that there is a reason why the sexual relationship is not covered until the last session—it keeps everyone coming until the end.



Review the RAM and explain that each of the five (including touch) is a major source of how we bond in our relationship. After your brief review, conclude with: **It is true that the first four definitely influence how a couple feels about engaging in any**

**type of touch in their relationship. These bonding areas of your relationship interact so that when one drops, it will impact the others. And it seems that for most people, their desire for affectionate or sexual touch is influenced by the levels of the other four.**



Explain: **But a good place to start is to acknowledge that the fifth dynamic bond of the RAM, Touch, can refer to many types of physical expressions... affection, supportive touches, hugs, companionship touch like holding hands or arm in arm; touch can be playful and fun. And, touch can be sexual.**



**So let me read the first question in your workbook: On surveys and questionnaires, what do you think couples say is the most common conflict husbands and wives have over sex?**



**"DISCUSSION QUESTION" *What do you think is the most common sexual conflict married couples experience?* Ideas:** Almost always the class will get this answer immediately: frequency is the most common conflict. It is most likely common because of the differences between

sex drives. Explain: **You are correct. For decades now, surveys have found the same thing... the most common argument couples seem to have about their sex life is timing and frequency. So *Why do you think this is so prevalent?***

You can ask the second half of this question, but you may get some “humorous” remarks that are potentially offensive. So, be prepared, or just ask it rhetorically and answer it in the following way before the class has opportunity to respond.

**This question is what we will spend some time answering in this session. Essentially, one of the big reasons that timing and frequency create conflicts is because both partners are not “identical.” They have different sexual drives, perspectives, needs and desires. So, it is just to be expected that they are not always on the same page in their sexual relationship. But that just means that they need to have really helpful and positive ways to talk together about their sexual expectations and desires. And that is what we are going to try to accomplish in this session.**



But let me provide an overview of the entire session. Basically, this entire session can be summarized in this one chart that builds around four topics:

1. SEX DRIVE: What is your sex drive? (frequency)
2. AROUSAL: What turns you on?

(sexual arousal, getting in the mood and preferences for initiating sexual involvement)

3. ROMANCE: How important is “romance” to you? What do you like to do that is romantic? (meaning, what does romance mean to each partner)
4. ANTICIPATION: What are your expectations for sexual closeness? How do you build up an anticipation for becoming sexually intimate (role of physical fatigue; emotional expectations; perceptions of refusal).

We will begin this session by defining terms so that we are all on the same page. Let’s begin with the sex drive...who can give a simple definition of what is the sex drive?

## A. SEX DRIVE: What Is Your Sex Drive?

 20 minutes



As you teach this, you will move down the left column on this chart. The definition of a sex drive must have the idea of frequency (how often, how motivated to want sexual activity, etc.). Allow the class to give words and ideas and guide them to

build the definition. Basically, the sex drive is the *frequency of your desire for sexual activity that occurs without participation in any sexual activity.*

This drive is both **biological** and **psychological**—it certainly involves your mind, body (biology), and relational experiences! You can think of the strength of the sex drive as ranging from low to high. The lower the sex drive, then the less frequently someone desires sex. Someone with a lower drive may say that they enjoy sex, but the frequency with which they want it or initiate it would be lower.

Frequency can be very subjective... what is the frequency of a really low drive... maybe 1-2x a month, or less? Or, what is the frequency of a really high drive? Maybe 1-2 a day, or more? You never quite know what a class participant is going to say. Letting the class answer does open the door for some humorous, inappropriate, or even offensive comments sometimes. You should be relaxed while collecting the ideas from the participants but make sure to keep the focus respectful while you work on defining the terms and be sure to not join in with anything inappropriate.

So, the higher someone's sex drive, the more frequently they think about sex or desire sexual activity without any apparent promptings.

Now, we cannot talk about sex without triggering lots of stereotypes. One of the most common is this: All men have \_\_\_\_\_ what kind of drive?... high or low? High, right? And all women have low drives.

So first, there is some truth in this stereotype. In surveys, more men express a higher drive than women. But do not be mistaken, do ALL men have really high drives? Absolutely not! There are men with very low drives, and there are men whose sex drive is significantly lower than their partner's sex drive.

And do all women have low drives? Of course not. There are women with really high drives. So, understand that both males and females can have a lower or a higher sex drive than their partner.

And this is what is most important. HOW DOES YOUR DRIVE COMPARE TO YOUR PARTNER'S SEX DRIVE? This is a question we will give you a chance to answer in a little bit. Because understanding how you are similar and different is necessary for knowing how to have a great sexual relationship.



## B. SEXUAL AROUSAL: What Turns You On?

 30 minutes

The next concept to understand is arousal. Let's define sexual arousal. Who

would be able to provide a good working definition of sexual arousal? (The class will provide words like stimulated, excited, hot, ready—you will write these on the board or on a flip chart and then summarize with a definition.

Arousal is the degree of intensity of feeling sexually excited which can be prompted by sexual touch, sensory stimulation, or just thoughts. So, there is a range of arousal from a low intensity to a high intensity.

So, the key word for arousal is intensity while the key word for sex drive is frequency.

Let me just clarify something... both the sex drive and sexual arousal are RANGES, not categories. There are not the high drives and low drives, just like there is not just high arousal or low arousal. The range is actually much greater—so it might be better to think of sex drives on a 1-10 range with 1 describing a very low sex drive and 10 describing a very high drive. The same range could also help to describe the intensity of sexual arousal.

-----  
Let's look at a couple examples of differences between the sex drive and sexual arousal. First, is it possible to have a high sex drive while also being highly aroused? Sure. But it is also possible to have a high drive but not be sexually aroused. This is because there are times when someone who has a high drive is not sexually aroused. The drive is more like a trait of a person while arousal is describing the state of the person at a specific moment in time.

What about this... is it possible to have a low sex drive (meaning that you infrequently desire sexual activity) but when you engage in the sexual act you experience high arousal? The answer again is yes and that this is normal/common.

But what about changes? Can your sex drive change over time? What are some things that can alter your sex drive or impact how you experience arousal change? The answer is yes—there are many things that can alter one's drive or arousal over the course of a marriage, as well as experiences from the past. This is a time to help address sexual problems in a very acceptable way that may be seriously affecting some of the couples in your class.

What are some of the common reasons people experience a change in their experiences of arousal and/or sex drive?

Collect the answers from the class and write them on the board. Ask, "What is one reason some people have a change in their drive or arousal? \_\_\_\_\_"

What is another? You will most likely collect a couple dozen of reasons from one of three categories: relational, psychological and physical. Some *relational* reasons include: the way that a couple touch each other during the sexual act, the amount

of time taken for generating arousal, unresolved conflicts, resentments, lack of love feelings, rejection, neglect. Some of the *psychological* causes are inability to concentrate or relax, difficulty transitioning from stresses of the day, previous sexual abuse, negative views of sex, inhibitions. Some of the *physical* reasons can be low testosterone, the physical structure of a female's organs (you can discuss this with a gynecologist), changes in hormones, physical pain, illnesses, medicines, diabetes and other conditions.

Be aware that a drive can go down but it also can increase. Most answers to this question will be about the things that lower a sex drive or lessen arousal. But you may want to point out that there are also things that can improve one's experience of arousal or increase a sex drive. This would include things like becoming more comfortable with one's body, making the act of sexual intimacy more personal and fulfilling, learning about sex, and physical changes with aging.

This gives you the opportunity to speak to sexual dysfunction of any cause without any personal disclosure from the group. You would conclude this by stating: **There may be some of you here that can relate to this list. I want you to know that there is no reason to be embarrassed. Sooner or later, we are all likely to be impacted by one or more of these life experiences. How many of you think that at some time in your future you will most likely experience a change in your sex drive or ability to experience arousal?**

**So, if this happens, what is someone to do? Well, if you know what is happening and are doing something about it then you are to be affirmed. And if you have had some difficulties but they are just short lived then this may be completely normal with the ups and downs of life.**

**However, if you have had a change in your sex drive or arousal and you are rounding the third, fourth or fifth month (or longer), then you should consider speaking to someone about this to figure it out. I would suggest that you start with your physician and get his/her opinion. Just know that many sexual difficulties do not fix themselves...if they have been there 3- 5 months then it is likely that they are going to be there in 3-5 years. Don't be embarrassed... just make sure to take a step in the right direction.**



**When you look back at this chart you can see that high and low drives are aroused by different types of stimuli. The lower your sex drive, the more your arousal is activated by participating in the sexual act. Touch is what tends to activate arousal with someone who has a lower sex drive. Of course, there may be**

some times when a person with a lower drive person will be interested in sex outside of any activity. At these times they will feel aroused without any participation. Arousal is activated by their drive. However, *usually* they don't feel much of a "drive" in that direction (because their drive is low) until they get started in sexual activity.

OK- let's talk about someone with a higher sex drive... What would you say turns on a high drive? This question often gets some humorous responses like, "A gentle breeze."

For instance, the high drive partner tends to be "turned on" by sensory stimulation. It is often portrayed that men are visual, but high drive men AND women are *sensory* stimulated. This includes visual, but also extends to auditory and olfactory (smell). The person with a fairly high drive does not need to be touched to be stimulated. In fact, their imagination is sometimes enough of a stimulus to cause the feelings of arousal.

Both the higher drive and the lower drive partners have their own challenges to overcome. The person with a higher drive thinks about sex a lot and may talk about it too much, appear overly focused on sex, and neglect investing time and energy into the other areas of the relationship that a partner, perhaps, really wants. In this case, the sexual drive starts to look self-serving, and their partner can feel that it is out of balance with the other areas of intimacy. The challenge then is for a person with a higher drive to work hard at cultivating the non-sexual aspects of the relationship that generate intimacy and closeness, particularly those that are most meaningful to their partner.

The partner with a lower drive also has a challenge. On the one hand, sexual arousal is usually not activated unless this person allows someone to sexually touch or stimulate him/her. But on the other hand, when not aroused, sexual touch can feel irritating! This can be discussed by the couples privately in the activity below.

Ask the class **What do you think most surveys list at the top as the most arousing interaction to get things going for a person with a fairly low drive?**

The answer is kissing.

You can encourage the couples to discuss in the next activity some of the ways to get started when one has a sex drive lower than their partner. **The challenge, then for this partner with a lower sex drive is to relax and engage slowly in touch that is stimulating.**

**There can be a very real challenge to blending different drives together in a mutually satisfying way. However, trying to meet each other's sexual**

needs is not really any different than the other areas of an intimate relationship that were discussed in Session Three (RELY) e.g. the top ten lists. The underlying attitude that makes for a successful relationship is a mutual willingness to meet each other's needs and wants. The sexual relationship is really no different.

## ACTIVITY: STRENGTHENING YOUR SEXUAL INTIMACY

The next activity that you are going to do is for couples to talk privately and openly about what you like in both the sexual and nonsexual areas that helps to either get you in the mood or enhances your overall sexual relationship and intimacy. Now it is your time to engage in a conversation about your sexual relationship. There are five questions in your workbook that you will use to talk through your relationship. We are not going to have you discuss this activity at your table (for obvious reasons) but I would like you to find a private place and talk through these five questions (see below) There is a chart in your workbook where you can list sexual and non-sexual activities that help set the right mood for sexual intimacy in your relationship. The goals are ways that you can better engage in those activities and improve your sexual closeness.



**"DISCUSSION QUESTION"** *Describe your own sex drive. Rate it on a 1-10 scale with the high drive being a 10.* *Ideas:* It is crucial to understand your own sex drive and to be able to talk about this with your partner. This is a starting point for couples...they need to acknowledge if their drive has changed and in what ways. They can also use frequency as a description of their drive—like how often a week or month they would like sexual relations.



**"DISCUSSION QUESTION"** *Try to honestly describe what creates your feelings of arousal?* *Ideas:* This is also important to be clear about in your marriage. You need to have thought about this area and talk about the ways you and your partner are similar and different. You also need to work together to fulfill each others desires for intimacy in both sexual and non-sexual ways.



**"DISCUSSION QUESTION"** *How have you and your partner experienced the challenge of meeting each other's needs, especially when your needs are different?* *Ideas:* Again, each partner needs to think about how to develop a mutually fulfilling relationship. If you are low drive, how can you respond to your partner's needs in a way that doesn't irritate you? Or, if you are a high drive, how can you work with your partner to make sure other types of intimacy are maintained?



**"DISCUSSION QUESTION"** *If you are high drive, how good are you at meeting the other non-sexual needs for intimacy? If you are low drive, how good are you at responding to your partner's initiations and allowing your partner to bring you into arousal?* *Ideas:* You need to develop an appreciation of the mutuality of meeting each other's needs. It is true in this area as well as the others that meeting my partner's needs that are different than what I would want benefits me in ways that I could have never gained on my own. This attitude, when embraced by both partners, achieves high levels of closeness and bonding in a marriage.


The following exercise helps a couple to identify what they both want in the sexual and non-sexual interactions. Explain that some of the same physical interactions can be either sexual or non-sexual. For instance, if the wife is low drive, a hug in the kitchen can mean to her that he is thinking of her (and this feeling of being loved and thought of will help her to get in the mood)...but to a high drive it may immediately mean that they are going to have a "quickie" before dinner. It is important that both sexual and non-sexual needs (for affection and touch) are met in a marriage relationship. Couples can use the following chart:

This chart in the workbook is to help them put down both sexual and non-sexual needs and wants that help them to either become aroused or enjoy their sexual activity. The goals are to be what they want to do more of or improve on.

SEXUAL NEEDS	NON-SEXUAL NEEDS	GOALS

**Obviously, you will not process this dyadic activity. Nor will you wander around and listen to what couples share. Just give them about 10-15 minutes to work through these questions.**

## C. ROMANCE: How Do You Spell “Romance”?

 40 minutes



There is a definite difference between how someone with a lower drive and someone with a higher drive views the ideal romantic night. For the lower drive partner, romance is many, many things- a special dinner together; a walk in the park; staring at the stars; sitting in front of a fire; having down time together

with nothing to do but just be together; a special gift; on and on. There are many things that go into a romantic experience, and sex does not *have* to be one of them.

But for the person with a higher drive, all these “romantic” activities lose their significance if sex is not involved. If the higher drive person goes out on the town, sees a terrific show, strolls through the moonlit park, has the most delightful dessert, but at the end of the day, climbs in bed only to hear- “Wow am I bushed, what a great day...well, goodnight;” then all that romance feels hollow.

To the lower drive partner, sex does not equal romance. But to the high drive person, romance without sex feels unfinished. It doesn’t even make sense... “Why wouldn’t you have sex when you are feeling so close, connected and romantic??”

But even though romance is sometimes associated with sex, it is important to practice romance apart from any sexual activity or implications. The following discussion question and activity help to capture many of the nonsexual activities that can enhance a couple’s closeness, sexual chemistry and feelings of romance.

Use the Workbook exercise Making Love Without Sex and share at your table your answers to the third question in that exercise: *3. Reminisce about your favorite romantic times with your partner.*

### EXERCISE: Making Love Without Sex

1. Identify five ways you would like to be romanced, and then discuss it with your partner. Look at your partner and reassure him/her that you will try to “do unto your partner as *your partner* would like” —not what *you* like to do.
2. Set dates to do each thing on your partner’s list. Romance will be sparked in your relationship ONLY if you *do* what you have promised. Setting a date will help move you to action!

**3. Reminiscence about your favorite romantic times with your partner.** Come up with ways that can repeat activities like this in the future.

You can lead the class into a further discussion on the importance of making time for romance. **Life can become routine and ordinary, and couples can lose their passion. Some of this is normal but the couples who plan time to be alone and try to be creative about new, romantic and adventurous things to do together find that they keep rekindling the fire of their passion and grow stronger in their sexual relationship over the course of their marriage.**

After the small group discussion, ask couples to work on identifying new romantic things they would like to do.



**"DISCUSSION QUESTION"** *List some romantic things you have done or would like to do?*

**OPTIONAL ADDITIONAL STEP:** You can add a drawing of things to do if you think certain couples will not have enough ideas. Type (or copy & paste) these ideas on a document to be printed. Then cut each one and then fold them--place them in a "love mug". Then have each person draw one (this can be exciting and fun because each person does not know what to expect). This "romantic draw" can be read to the rest of the class and should be added to the ideas generated in the first point. You can also suggest that one week the females perform their romantic acts, while the men do their romantic acts on another.

*Here are 30 ideas—feel free to add more.*

- |                                 |   |
|---------------------------------|---|
| 1. Make breakfast in bed.       | 17. Pack a picnic basket/go to a park.        |
| 2. Give an oil massage.         | 18. Take a hike in the woods.                 |
| 3. Share a favorite love song.  | 19. Go to a sporting event.                   |
| 4. Go fishing together.         | 20. Learn a new dance.                        |
| 5. Wash each other's cars.      | 21. Take a walk.                              |
| 6. Sit out under the stars.     | 22. Take a long drive in the country.         |
| 7. Dance.                       | 23. Give a pedicure/foot massage.             |
| 8. Send flowers.                | 24. Wear something sexy to bed.               |
| 9. Write a love poem.           | 25. Buy or make a special gift or card.       |
| 10. Hold hands.                 | 26. Text them a love note.                    |
| 11. Go to a concert or play.    | 27. Hide love notes.                          |
| 12. Propose...again.            | 28. Kiss.                                     |
| 13. Go to a museum.             | 29. Write a love song about them and sing it! |
| 14. Call and ask out on a date. | 30. Leave chocolate on their pillow.          |
| 15. Dress up and go to dinner.  |   |
| 16. Cook a candlelight dinner.  |   |

## D. ANTICIPATION: Is Sex Physical or Emotional

 20 minutes

**Sex is more than just a physical act; it is also emotional and relational. It is sometimes stereotyped that a person with a higher sex drive just views sex as a physical act, while someone with a lower drive views it as an emotional act. However, it is common for someone with a lower sex drive to not be in the mood because of physical reasons and to anticipate engaging in sex as a physical activity (e.g. it is late, and I am tired). On the other hand, it is common for someone with a higher sex drive to anticipate the sexual act with strong emotions (if there was a promise in the morning to engage in sex that evening, a higher drive partner will often think about it all day long).**

**So, in some ways, the partner with the lower sex drive thinks and anticipates the sex as a physical activity which the partner with a higher drive anticipates the sexual act with strong emotions.**

**It is the lower drive individual who is more likely to turn down a sexual advance because of feeling too tired. Yet a higher drive is likely to still want sexual relations even if exhausted. And if turned down, the higher drive is likely to feel very hurt and dejected (see the chart for ANTICIPATION)—This is what the chart means. For many people, the higher the drive, the more significant is the sexual experience for an emotional feeling of closeness. And the lower the drive, the more the sexual act is anticipated as a physical activity.**

OPTION #1: There are numerous sitcoms that act out this conflict. Look for an episode or a clip from a movie that portrays the tension of high and low drive partners trying to make it work. Also, try and find clips that portray good role models.

OPTION #2: Dr. Van Epp related a story in his certification course video about a wife with a very high sex drive who was married to a husband with a low sex drive. Their relationship illustrates that the conflicts are more related to the differences in sexual drives between partners rather than male-female stereotypes. You can use this story- just begin with, “Dr. Van Epp relayed a previous case example he had” ... you can review that portion of the video course and retell the story (described below).

**Dr. Van Epp related a story in his certification course video about a wife who had a very high sex drive and was married to a husband with a low sex drive. He drove a truck for a living, and they began to have conflicts over frequency after their third child was born and he had to take a second shift on his job (so he arrived home around midnight).**

**After making sure that there were no relationship causes or physical causes to their infrequent sex, it became clear that the husband was reluctant**

to engage sexually because he was tired when coming home late from his second shift at work, and typically sleeping later in the morning than when his wife had to get up. He had a low sex drive, didn't feel much of a need for sexual involvement, and viewed the act as more of a physical engagement than a time of emotional and physical closeness.

After several sessions of discussing these differences between the husband and wife and exploring the ways that sexual intimacy enhances their relationship and helps the higher drive wife to feel close and connected, they agreed to making some intentional changes in their routine. The husband agreed to be more willing to join in with his wife when she initiated sexual intimacy, and she softened in her frustration and anger. They talked about how frequently they would have sex and set some dates for their time together before their next appointment.

However, when they returned for their next counseling appointment, the wife was more upset, complaining that their plans just did not work. She said that after the last appointment, she was very encouraged and had high hopes for the times they planned on being together sexually. She bought some massage oil and in their first evening together, she rubbed his back to get him in the mood. She thought he was getting excited because he was breathing heavily, but when she looked closely, she found that he wasn't excited, he was sleeping!!

I want you to think about two things. First, how they ANTICIPATED their time together differently. To the wife, who had a fairly high sex drive, there was a long and emotional anticipation of being together that resulted in a major disappointment when it didn't work out. On the other hand, her husband, who had a fairly low drive, didn't see the big deal of falling asleep... he was just tired!

In the past, her husband would accuse her of just wanting sex (like it was a physical act just for her own pleasure) while the wife would perceive his reluctance as rejection. Both had to become more appreciative of their partner's perspective and learn to value their differences rather than attack each other for them. She admitted that she could have gently woken him up and continued in their time together rather than becoming so offended and hurt.

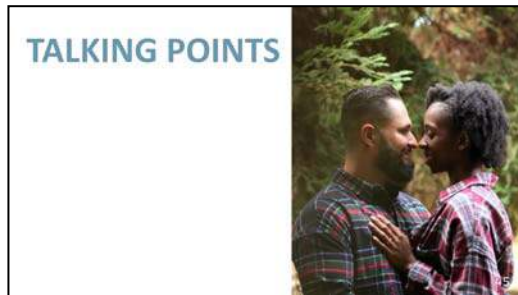


And he agreed to participate more actively in order to become aroused.

And this is actually the second thing I want to point out from this case story. This goes back to what we saw in this chart about how those with a lower sex drive become sexually aroused. The

problem is that he did not realize that participating meant that he had to be involved in the initial activity. Participation does not mean just lying there while you receive a massage. He had to engage in order to start his feelings of arousal. This is true of most lower drive people, they become aroused as they step into some acts of sexual intimacy. You could say that there is a big difference between being kissed and kissing someone. Once they talked about this and he became more involved, their sexual relationship greatly improved.

## DISCUSSION TOPICS



There are several points of discussion that you should talk about in private. Ask which of these points apply to us and in what ways? Use the last discussion question after these six points to set some positive goals to improve your sexual relationship and romance in areas that you think are lacking.



1. Both (especially lower drives) need to initiate sometimes.

You can lead the class to talk about this: Many higher drive partners feel like they always do the initiating. Sharing the act of initiating can be beneficial to both. Lower drive partners need to feel like

they are sexually involved, not just responding. When they plan and bring about an initiation of sexual involvement (even if not a big production) then they feel more sexually empowered. In addition, the other person feels more attractive because their partner has shown interest in them.

Dr. Van Epp told another story that you can repeat: Let me tell you a story from Dr. Van Epp about a middle-aged woman who had a very low drive but was married to a high drive partner. Her husband happened to be a Christian minister who had the practice of rising early and heading off to his church office for a quiet time with God. He was fairly predictable as he had a ribbon in his Bible where he did his daily reading. For almost ten years of their marriage, she and her husband had many arguments about sex, primarily because she was not real interested. But in her thirties, she decided to take some ownership of their sexual relationship and her own sexuality. So, she wanted to become more active in their sexual relationship.

The first thing she did is to take a sticky note pad and write all of the

ways she would like to enhance her sexual relationship with her husband. After she finished, she realized that her husband would love to read her list. But she wanted to surprise him with it in a way that would be memorable. So, after he went to bed, she put that note in his Bible, right where he had the ribbon, so that in the morning, when he would turn to his reading he would find it.

The next morning, he left for the church early as was his habit. She pretended to be sleeping, but as he went out the door, she checked the clock, knowing that it takes him about 20 minutes to drive to church. She figured he would call her right away and thank her for wanting to improve their sexual relationship.

However, 30 minutes went by, then 40, 50... she was feeling disappointed that he seemed to be unresponsive. But just about that time, in the distance, she heard a car—screaming tires and shifting like a race car in the Indy 500. As she looked out the window, she saw her husband jumping out of the car while he unbuttoned his shirt. He bounded into their bedroom and proclaimed, “I had the best time with God this morning!!”

This began her “sticky note” flirting. She put them everywhere. One evening, they were watching a movie and he got up and went into the kitchen. He returned for a bit but then rose again to go into his office. The third time he left her on the couch and headed into the dining room she said, “What in the world are you doing?” She found him on his hands and knees looking up under the dining room table mumbling, “There has to be a sticky note here somewhere!!”

When she shared this story in a training that Dr. Van Epp was conducting, she ended it by saying this: “You may think that what I did was all about pleasing my husband. But what it really was about is taking ownership of my own sexuality. I needed to see that our sex life was not just “his thing”—it had to also become “my thing” so that together, it could be “our thing.”

<p><b>TALKING POINTS</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Both (especially lower drives) need to initiate sometimes.</li><li>2. Both (especially higher drives) need to not always be looking for the green light.</li></ol>	
--	---

2. Both (especially higher drives) need to not always be looking for the green light.

You can ask the class...If the high drive is always looking for a *green light*, then who is the one that will always be giving the red-light?!? Obviously, the partner with the lower drive will be the

one to say “no” over and over. The higher drive partner needs to be careful *not* to make the lower drive partner the gatekeeper.


You can imagine a high drive husband coming into the kitchen and giving a hug to his wife after laboring over a nice, romantic meal. And if the wife responds with an innocent but sexual movement, then you can imagine the high drive's automatic question: "NOW?"

The wife might not even know what her husband is talking about. But when his intent becomes clear, the wife might respond with frustration—I have spent 2 hours cooking a meal and it is on the table, the candles are lit, and the kids are patiently waiting for us to sit down so they can eat." The husband might answer, "Well... let them eat—that will give them something to do while we..."

This husband missed an opportunity to hug, make his wife feel appreciated and loved, and flirt with no strings attached. Partners with all types of drives need to initiate affection, flirting, and touch at times when they are not looking for anything more. When every type of touch is viewed by a higher drive partner as a possible invitation to a sexual act, then they may come to be viewed as only wanting sex.

**TALKING POINTS**

1. Both (especially lower drives) need to initiate sometimes.
2. Both (especially higher drives) need to not always be looking for the green light.
3. Both (especially lower drives) need acceptable times to say "not now."



3. Both (especially lower drives) need acceptable times to say "not now."

The goal for harmonizing a couple's sex life is not that the low drive partner can never say "no" but rather that there is a feeling of mutual attraction and respect. Although partners should go

along with the advances of their partners in most instances, there needs to be an understanding of how to say, "This is not a good time" in ways that are not upsetting or rejecting. It is important that couples have ways of postponing sexual activity in mutually understanding and acceptable ways.

**TALKING POINTS**

1. Both (especially lower drives) need to initiate sometimes.
2. Both (especially higher drives) need to not always be looking for the green light.
3. Both (especially lower drives) need acceptable times to say "not now."
4. Both (especially higher drives) need to find acceptable ways to initiate.



4. Both (especially higher drives) need to find acceptable ways to initiate.

Sometimes both the higher and lower drive partners do not approach in ways that really help to bring their partner into the mood. Partners can become overly sensitive and reactive. It is

important to talk about the approaches that work best and to try to avoid misunderstandings.

Also, the types of touch that excite a lower drive partner need to be understood. For instance, a long back rub may relax a low drive but they don't

consider it something that gets them in the mood. Rather, some lower drive partners need non-sexual things to help get them in the mood... some good conversation, caught up on some chores or tasks, downtime, a romantic setting.

Some studies have shown that gentle kissing is the most common erotic activity that helps to build excitement with those who have lower sex drives. But couples need to talk about these areas of initiation and approach so that there is a greater security and understanding.

**TALKING POINTS**

1. Both (especially lower drives) need to initiate sometimes.
2. Both (especially higher drives) need to not always be looking for the green light.
3. Both (especially lower drives) need acceptable times to say "not now."
4. Both (especially higher drives) need to find acceptable ways to initiate.
5. If there are frequent refusals then the reasons need to be discussed and understood.



5. If either partner frequently resists going along with sexual initiations, then the reason(s) should be understood and discussed.

Just because someone has a lower drive, it does not mean that they frequently resist or refuse to engage sexually. Here are some of the more common reasons given for a pattern of refusal. Sometimes it is because they are missing something in the relationship; there may be some past experience(s) that makes sex difficult; they may have a negative view of sex; it could also be a sign of a power struggle; there may be difficulty relaxing and getting their minds off of the activities of the day; they may have body-image issues that make them overly self conscious; they may have "space issues" and being touched feels agitating and intrusive—which makes it difficult to let their partner get them in the mood. There can also be physical and/or medical causes. Physical shape, overweight, medicines, and physical conditions can all contribute to difficulties in sexual arousal or performance.

In all cases, refusals should be explored, understood and addressed. However, it is possible that a partner just gets into the habit of refusing and it has become a "knee-jerk" reaction to being approached with a sexual advance. In these cases, that partner may need to work on being more open and willing to relax and join in with the partner.

**TALKING POINTS**

1. Both (especially lower drives) need to initiate sometimes.
2. Both (especially higher drives) need to not always be looking for the green light.
3. Both (especially lower drives) need acceptable times to say "not now."
4. Both (especially higher drives) need to find acceptable ways to initiate.
5. If there are frequent refusals then the reasons need to be discussed and understood.
6. Sometimes sexual touch can be enjoyed without intercourse or climax.



6. Sometimes sexual touch can be enjoyed without intercourse or climax.

Studies have shown that it is normal for some people to enjoy sexual involvement without climaxing. A partner may view this as a sign of not pleasing their partner, or some personal inadequacy. However, this may actually be a preference now and then.

Couples need to talk openly about what they want and need in this area of climaxing, and to be able to work together to please each other while also accepting and supporting some of the differences that may exist between them.

It is also important that couples engage in many types of affectionate and sexual touch outside of lovemaking. Some couples would be greatly benefited by kissing on the couch for 20-30 minutes without going any further. Couples need to be careful that they do not fall into ruts in all areas their relationship, and this is especially true for their sexual relationship.



**"DISCUSSION QUESTION"** *Set two or three agreed upon goals that will help improve your sexual relationship?*

*Ideas:* Use this question to help pull together romance and sex. Remind couples that regardless of their drives (high or low), it is important to keep the feeling of attraction, romance and passion in their relationship. Couples do not have to "settle" for a mundane relationship when *both* are committed to being creative, involved, attentive and faithful.

## E. Good Sex: A Meeting of the Minds (and Bodies)

 10 minutes

The conclusion of this session is that sex is always relational, even if it is recreational. It is both a physical act that meets physical needs, but it stimulates the emotional bond that keeps a relationship healthy.

One very common mistake couples often make is that they stop talking about their sexual relationship (or never got started). It is vital to the health of their relationship to be sure to not get in the rut of avoidance. Often, a couple has not been able to find a balance in their sexual relationship and, as a result, they stopped discussing it. The longer they avoid it, the farther apart they become... and the more uncomfortable the sexual relationship becomes.



Therefore, include in your huddle discussions about the RAM this important area of sexual intimacy. Even though it is part of your needs in the reliance dynamic, it is a powerful generator of attraction, closeness and bond that it should occupy some specific time and discussion.

Sex is a meeting of the mind and body. It is both an expression and an experience of love. When the other four areas of the RAM are growing and strong, the sexual relationship feels the most safe and satisfying.

Before concluding the last session it is a good idea to lead a review about the importance of regularly strengthening each of the love bonds of the RAM. Remind the couples that a healthy relationship is not balanced, but balancing. *Ask couples to talk about the ways they will “run their relationship” differently... beyond just having regular huddles.*

**If you choose to have a commitment ceremony then give the couples a little bit of time to review and add anything to the commitments they wrote at the end of Session Four (“from this day forward, I promise \_\_\_\_\_”). Challenge the couples to include a 6-month promise to have regular huddles with the four steps of applying the RAM. You should then have the couples stand facing each other and holding hands and read their commitments to each other.**



**“DEEP THOUGHT”** *“A dress that zips up the back will bring a husband and wife together.”* James H. Boren.

## INSTRUCTOR EVALUATION FORM FOR SESSION FIVE

Rate your accomplishment of the lesson goals on a 1 to 5 scale.

**1 Not taught**

**2 Very difficult to teach this point**

**3 Somewhat difficult to teach this point**

**4 Somewhat easy to teach this point**

**5 Very easy to teach this point**

### Goals

To understand sex drives and how they may vary between partners.

To understand how sex drives may affect what turns people on.

To understand that sex drives and levels of arousal may not necessarily be the same.

To gain an understanding of how your sexual relationship relates to romance.

To understand that sex is both emotional and relational.

**Lesson-At-a-Glance**    Total Class Time \_\_\_\_\_

<b>Section</b>	<b>Suggested Time</b>	<b>Actual Time</b>
1. What is your sex drive?	20 minutes	_____
2. What turns you on?	30 minutes	_____
3. How do you spell romance?	40 minutes	_____
4. Is sex physical or emotional?	20 minutes	_____
5. Good sex: A Meeting of the Minds (and Bodies).	10 minutes	_____

