

# Couple LINKS Research Overview



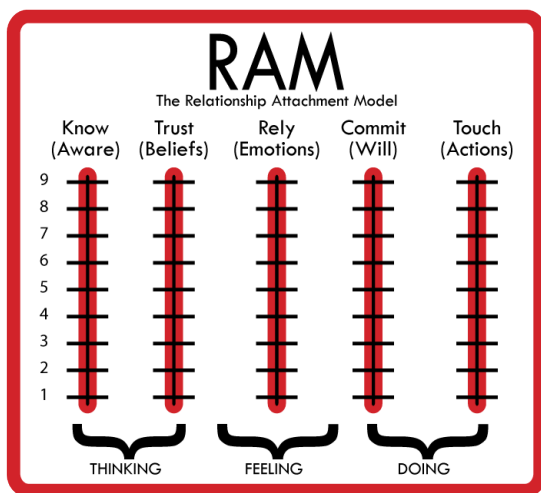
The following report summarizes the research on the Couple LINKS Program. For research summaries on the other programs offered by Love Thinks please visit [www.lovethinks.com](http://www.lovethinks.com) or email [info@lovethinks.com](mailto:info@lovethinks.com).



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# Overview of the Courses that teach the RAM

The Relationship Attachment Model™ (RAM) is an easy-to-understand, interactive model that provides a framework for integrating the basic systems of the



self, the connections in relationships, and the major psychological theories. First, this model proposes that there are five distinct and inter-related systems of self: a sensory system, a cognitive system, an affective/emotional system, a volitional system, and a tactile/sexual system. Second, each system contributes a unique connection to the overall experience of relationships: the sensory system contributes awareness within the self with the connection of knowing others; the cognitive system contributes beliefs within the self with the connection of trusting others; the affective/emotional system produces emotions within the self with the connection of relying on others; the volitional system produces a will within the self with the connection of commitments to others; and the tactile/sexual system contributes actions/expressions within the self with the contribution of touching others. The first two dynamics relate mostly to thinking processes

(sensory integration theory, cognitive theory, attachment theory, object relations theory); the third to feeling or affective processes (social exchange theory, emotionally-focused theory); and the last two relate mostly to behavioral processes (behavioral theories, sexual theories).

The RAM can explain the connections in four key relationships of life: how one relates with oneself, others, circumstances and spirituality. These four domains capture most life experiences.

## COUNSELING WITH THE RAM

This course explains counseling theory and research integrated and supported by the RAM. It uses the RAM to provide a framework for understanding the counselor's relationship with a client/constituent in counseling and then a framework to understand the constituent's relationships with others, self, circumstances and spirituality. In the case of the former, the course teaches key areas to explore with a client (KNOW), ways to develop a therapeutic alliance and trust while formulating an accurate conceptualization of the client (TRUST); ways to determine the competency of the counselor to meet the needs of the client (RELY); ways to determine the plan to help the client (COMMIT) and follow-up with the client (TOUCH) to ensure that treatment/support/referrals are effective in client's life.

## PICK (Premarital Interpersonal Choices & Knowledge)

This course applies the RAM to singles' romantic relationships with emphasizing healthy relationship development (each level should not exceed a previous level in developing relationships) and five crucial areas to explore to accurately KNOW a partner

from other relationships, compatibility potential and relationship skills).

### **LINKS (Lasting Intimacy through Nurturing, Knowledge & Skills)**

This course applies the RAM to couples' relationships with emphasizing that the balance of the RAM connections will naturally fluctuate. The key is that couples regularly balance their imbalances by strengthening and setting goals with each of the five dynamics of the RAM in weekly "huddles."

### **OUR HOME RUNS (Families stepping up to the plate)**

This course applies the RAM to family relationships to strengthen the ways that families communicate, respect, work and play together, support and build family resilience, and express affection and affirmation. Our Home Runs, like the LINKS course, also teaches a practical format using the RAM but in this case, for family meetings: Catch Up (know), Patch Up (trust/respect), Dream Up (rely through working and playing together), Back Up (commit & support), and Build Up (expressing affection & affirmations).

### **ULTIMATE SPIRITUAL RESILIENCY & RELATIONSHIPS (R&R)**

The last course applies the RAM to the development of spirituality. This pluralistic course encourages individual exploration and small group interaction while emphasizing that spirituality is resilient to the proportion that it is a positive source of strength to the three other relationships of life: how one relates with him/herself, others, and the circumstances of life. Although all humans are spiritual beings, spirituality can also be developed and the RAM provides a practical framework for understanding this journey. This process begins with one's awareness of spirituality (KNOW) and his/her own spiritual values/beliefs (TRUST); the process of developing and deepening spirituality requires that these values and beliefs also become sources of strength (RELY) in how circumstances and emotions are managed; and finally, priorities and decisions (COMMIT), and relationships with others (TOUCH) need to be consistent with these spiritual values and beliefs.

### **MILITARY SETTINGS: CH-BOLC**

Pastoral Counseling with the RAM is taught in Phase Two of the Army Chaplain Basic Officer Leadership Course. Chaplains are instructed in counseling theory and marriage and family relationship research in the first half of this course. Then they are taught how to conduct an initial counseling interview, form a conceptualization and simple treatment plan for a client/constituent, and determine competency, need for referral, follow-up and pastoral care.

Three certification courses are taught in Phase Three that apply the RAM to three key relationships: PICK for premarital romantic relationships; LINKS for couple relationships; and Our Home Runs for family relationships.

The use of the RAM provides a CONTINUITY of training in both pastoral care and the practical courses taught in Strong Bonds to help singles, couples and families build healthier and more resilient relationships.

### **MILITARY SETTINGS: C4**

PICK and LINKS have been taught to Chaplain Captian's Career Course (C4) classes when it was determined that the majority of students have not received certification in these courses. If student-chaplains have been trained then updates of materials are provided and reviewed.

The Ultimate Spiritual R&R course is also taught to C4 classes to provide chaplains with a course that is consistent with principles in the Comprehensive Soldier Fitness resiliency training and able to be taught in pluralistic settings.



# Overview of Couple LINKS workshop

## OVERVIEW

It is normal to fall out of balance in your marriage... but problems occur when you do not regularly balance your imbalances. This overview of the LINKS course teaches how to intentionally “run your relationship” with the easy-to-understand Relationship Attachment Model. Couples will strengthen the five ties that bind: their communication, their trust and respect, how they work and play together, their commitment and their affection and sexual intimacy. There are available secular, military and Christian faith-based versions.

## DESCRIPTION

LINKS has secular, military (pre and post deployment), and Christian faith-based versions. The couples' workbooks have exercises/activities that facilitate couple and small group interaction that applies the material and helps couples develop resilient and intentional relationships. This course has over two thousand certified instructors, and is taught in social agencies, churches and faith organizations, prison re-entry programs, and relationship coalitions throughout the country; and, specifically as a training course in the US Army Strong Bonds Program and at the Army Chaplains Basic Officer Leadership Course (CH-BOLC) since 2005.

The LINKS for Couples is formatted to be used in small group, classroom and therapy group settings. In addition, the course and portions of the course are easily adapted for counseling, coaching and mentoring settings. LINKS can be taught by any certified instructor (no license or educational background is required). The RAM is an excellent assessment tool to use with couples. The LINKS for Couples Relationship course on DVD can also be viewed by couples and can be assigned for video-therapy homework by therapists.

The LINKS course is especially well-received with males because the entire course is an expansion of the RAM-- a visual and interactive model that simply but comprehensively portrays the levels of closeness in a relationship.

The LINKS course has been rated in the excellent range by the majority of participants after certified instructors have taught the course. A range of small group and couple activities allow the certified instructors to tailor the course to the needs of the couples attending. There is a military version workbook with alternative pre- and post-deployment activities that expand the versatility and applicability of this course. There is also a Christian version (C-LINKS) that integrates a dynamic Bible study with all of the program material. The focus on teaching couples to manage the bonds or closeness in their relationship is strongly supported by research conducted on the importance of close relationships for personal resiliency, lowered divorce rates, and satisfaction in marriage (Worthington, 2005).

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

In the LINKS Course couples will:

1. Learn a simple method of assessing the closeness in their relationship with the Relationship Attachment Model.
2. Gain a simple and practical plan for regular couple meetings (called huddles) in which they review their communication, express their love and appreciation, and set short-term goals that make positive adjustments to the five key dynamic bonds of their relationship.
3. Explore deeply each of the five dynamic bonds: how you know each other, trust and respect each other, work together and meet each other's needs, strengthen your commitment and enhance your sexual relationship.

4. Learn and practice the skills that facilitate each of the five dynamic bonds in the RAM (communication, body language, maintaining positive and appreciative attitudes toward each other, affirmations, forgiveness, conflict management, rebuilding broken trust, meeting the unique needs of a partner, strengthening exercises for commitment, enhancing the romance and the mutual enjoyment of the sexual relationship).

5. Gain the skills needed to “bounce back” and “reconnect” after separations, conflicts, times of difficulties, crises, disruptions in routine and changes in roles.

### **TEACHING & TRAINING METHODS**

The LINKS course involves brief lectures, class discussion, small group activities and couple exercises.

### **MATERIALS**

Program materials come in English, Spanish and Chinese languages, with over 5,000 instructors teaching this course in all 50 states and 10 countries.

### **INSTRUCTOR CERTIFICATION COURSE**

The LINKS certification course includes the instructor lesson plans (100+ pages); 8-hour DVD Certification Course for training; 2-DVD live presentation of 5 lesson program; power point CD; copy of the participant workbook and mini-RAM. Participants will also gain access to the private LINKS instructor sections of the website for additional instructional materials and free downloads.



# Healthy Relationships & the Military

Military marriages face added challenges when compared to civilian marriages. For example, service members who marry outnumber the population proportionally and the divorce rate of service members proportionally outnumbers divorces among the civilian population (Adler-Baeder, Pittman, Taylor). In addition, military marriages are faced with more divorce risks than civilian marriages such as: a lower age at first marriage than the general population (Martin & McClure, 2000), frequent deployments, frequent relocations, separations from family and a job that involves physical danger (Ader-Baeder, Pittman, & Taylor). However, one of the most crucial challenges to military marriages occurs from deployment experiences (Angrist & Johnson). Both the deployed spouse and the partner at home face unique and life-altering changes that can test even the best of relationships (Cozza, Chun & Polo) and one of the most pressing challenges facing these military marriages is maintaining healthy relationships during the difficult time of separation and following reunion (Induk, et al.). In order to address the specific needs of those in military marriages, an effective intervention program must be employed to intervene in at least two critical time periods: pre-deployment and post-deployment. In addition, two other times are also critical to the cohesion and adjustment of the couple: mid-deployment and 3-months post-deployment (see Schumm, Bell & Gade, 2000).

## Benefits of Marriage for the Military

Research has demonstrated that soldiers who are happily married tend to be better soldiers. Therefore the Army would benefit from promoting marriage education that specifically addresses the difficult

issues that plague military marriages. Research has shown that:

- Married soldiers were more likely to remain on active duty than single ones (Raiha, 1986).
- Marriage increased the retention rates for males, especially if they were happily married (Schumm, et al., 1996).
- Married soldiers served longer than single soldiers and tended to have a higher commitment to the Army (Burnam, et al., 1992).
- Happily married soldiers were given higher ratings by their supervisors than single soldiers (Orthner, et al., 1992), were promoted faster (Raiha, 1986) and had fewer job-related problems over the past four decades (Burnam, et al., 1992).

# Couple LINKS Research

The Couple LINKS program has been taught to soldiers and Chaplains all over the world and has been used by community organizations and coalitions around the country. The following page will review the research conducted on the LINKS program with civilians. Additionally, reviews by United States Army Chaplains of their Marriage LINKS trainings will be provided.

## Study One

### Michigan Healthy Marriage Coalition. (2008)

This data collection was conducted by the Michigan Healthy Marriage Coalition which included three counties in Michigan: Jackson, Lenawee, and Wayne. The participants who received the LINKS program included both incarcerated and non-incarcerated individuals and couples. Pre and post test data was conducted. Overall 10,000 individuals were served by the Michigan Healthy Marriage Coalition with 47% coming from the prison population and 51% were TANF eligible.

### Findings

After completing the program, participants significantly changed in the desired direction in attitudes and knowledge gained from the program in all categories. Specifically participants:

- Increased their understanding that marriages have a built in resistance to change.
- Learned skills for building and maintaining a healthy relationship.
- Gained a better understanding of how to avoid developing resentments in their marriage.
- Learned healthy communication skills.
- Learned how to successfully resolve conflicts.

Additionally at the 6-month follow-up participants reported the following:

- 73% reported increased conflict resolution skills.
- 91% reported increased confidence in their ability to have a healthy marriage.
- 62% reported increased commitment to their relationship.
- 61% reported an improvement in their relationship.

### Implications

Based on the findings, this data suggested that the LINK program was successful in helping improve the marriages of low-income and incarcerated couples. This sample was comprised of relationships that have shown to be at a high-risk for dissolution. Overall, the data found that participants in the LINKS program learned healthy relationship skills such as communication and conflict resolution. Additionally, 61% reported an improvement in their relationship and 91% reported increased confidence in their ability to have a healthy marriage.

# PICK & LINKS

## Research

**Marriage Works! Ohio: Elizabeth's New Life Center. Dayton, Ohio.**

### Overview

The Love Thinks program was delivered to n= 1428 participants in the Dayton, Ohio areas. Approximately n= 566 participants completed both the pre and post-test evaluations based on their experience in the program. The Love Thinks program is a combination of the popular PICK a Partner and Couple LINKS programs. These programs were combined so that single, dating, engaged, and married participants could all attend the same course. Results revealed significant program effects on all variables. The results are summarized in the following table.

### Findings

- 94% were satisfied with the program
- 95% intend to use the information they learned in their relationships
- 93% increased their understanding of how to maintain a close bond in their relationship

### Implications

The results of his analysis suggested that the Love Thinks program had a significant effect on all variables assessed. Specifically, the Love Thinks program served to increase participants' satisfaction in their relationships as well as increase the frequency participants intentionally managed their relationship.

How satisfied are you with...	Before	After	T-value
Your overall relationship	4.32	4.90	11.33
How you and your partner discuss your disagreements	3.34	4.32	15.56
The communication in your relationship	3.46	4.42	15.09
How your partner meets your needs	4.20	4.62	7.56
The level of trust you have for your partner	4.41	4.92	8.89
The level of trust your partner has for you	4.85	4.22	10.16
The chemistry in your relationship	4.54	4.90	6.86
Your sexual relationship	4.40	4.59	3.26
The amount of commitment in your relationship	4.65	5.03	6.51
How often...			
Is your partner willing to compromise	3.50	3.78	8.16
Are you willing to compromise	3.82	4.07	3.01
Do you understand each other's needs	3.49	3.79	7.50
Do you feel confident that you will be able to effectively solve problems with your partner	3.59	4.03	9.83
Do you let go of the upset feelings you have for your partner	3.72	4.03	7.58
Do you and your partner plan to spend time together as a couple	3.77	4.13	7.30
Do you listen to each other when having an argument	3.34	3.74	9.10
Do you and your partner discuss your sexual relationship	3.46	3.63	2.26
Do you and your partner use a calendar to plan things to do as a couple	2.51	3.01	8.78

*Note: satisfaction was measured on a 6 point scale ranging from 1= very dissatisfied to 6 = very satisfied and frequency was measured on a 5 point scale ranging from 1= never to 5 = almost always. A significant program effect was found for all items at the  $p < .0001$  level.*

# Instructor & Military Feedback with LINKS

A total of 1,351 military Chaplains were surveyed following trainings in the PICK a Partner and Couple LINKS programs. The majority of the Chaplains were trained as part of the Chaplain Basic Officer Leadership Course (82%) and the remaining Chaplains were trained at Strong Bonds events (18%). These results are different than those reported above because the Chaplains were not just participants in the program, they were being trained to teach the program to others. The majority of the Chaplains trained in the PICK and LINKS courses were male (87%), married (79%), and white (55%). Overall, the results indicated that the Chaplains were satisfied with their trainings and felt that these courses will help singles and married couples build and maintain healthy relationships.

## U.S. Military Chaplains: LINKS Program Evaluation

These findings represent the aggregate of numerous LINKS trainings provided to military Chaplains. The feedback data and some select comments are below.

	% Agree	% Slightly Agree	% Slightly Disagree	% Disagree
The instructor gave clear explanations of the program material.	97.8	2.2		
I increased my understanding of how to maintain a close bond in marriage.	96.8	3.1		0.2
The LINKS program provides answers to relevant issues couples face	96.9	2.4	0.2	0.2
I believe the LINKS program will benefit couples	95.4	4.3		0.3
I increased my understanding and confidence of how to effectively teach the LINKS program.	91.8	7.9	0.2	0.2
Overall, I am very satisfied with my training in the LINKS program	95.0	5.0		

## Select comments from Chaplain participants.

Great training, very well-paced and enjoyable. Already have a thought about a target audience at my unit.
Excellent instructor. You kept my attention in my last week of CHBOLC! You had great stories that captivated my attention.
I liked this training over all the other relationship/marriage trainings we have received.
Outstanding! Hoah!
I really appreciated the sections on deployment and reunion. I will use these in my unit and in my own marriage.
The RAM is so easy to understand! Would love to see the RAM program for families.
This was a superior experience and by far the most relevant and practical of programs taught.



# DR JOHN VAN EPP

author | speaker | trainer

## about John

John Van Epp, PhD in Counseling Psychology, is the founder of Love Thinks, LLC and author of *How to Avoid Falling in Love with a Jerk*, published by McGraw-Hill. His pastoral background, twenty-five years of clinical experience and extensive research in premarital, marital and family relations have paved the way for his courses, *PICK (How to Avoid Falling for a Jerk)*, *Couple LINKS*, *Our Home Runs*, *Ultimate Spiritual R&R*, and *Pastoral Counseling with the RAM* to be taught in thousands of churches, singles organizations, military and educational settings and social agencies in all fifty states, ten countries and by more than 6,000 instructors certified by Dr. Van Epp.

Van Epp and his innovative Relationship Attachment Model, book and relationship courses were awarded the Smart Marriage Impact Award (2008) and have been featured in *The Wall Street Journal*, *Time Magazine*, *Psychology Today*, *O Magazine*, and *Cosmopolitan*; and he has appeared on the CBS Early Show, the O'Reilly Factor, Fox News, and Focus on the Family.

“EYE OPENING AND PRACTICAL, HOW TO AVOID FALLING IN LOVE WITH A JERK IS FOR ANYONE WHO’S TIRED OF DATING AND WANTS TO FINALLY FIND “THE ONE”.”

JOHN GRAY, AUTHOR OF *MEN ARE FROM MARS, WOMEN ARE FROM VENUS*

## POPULATIONS SERVED

The United States Army, Navy, Coast Guard, Air Force, & Marines

Marriage & Family Coalitions

Incarcerated Youth & Adults

Faith-based Organizations & Churches

Divorced & Single-Again Adults

Recovery Organizations & Programs

Domestic Violence & Pregnancy Centers

“FROM A RICH CLINICAL AND ACADEMIC BACKGROUND, DR. VAN EPP IS ABLE TO EXPLAIN THEORY & RESEARCH WITH SUCH PRACTICAL INSIGHTS, PERSONAL STORIES, & A CONTAGIOUS SENSE OF HUMOR!”  
US ARMY CHAPLAIN, LOVE THINKS INSTRUCTOR

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resources for developing healthy individuals & relationships



“  
**WITH ALL THE CHANGES IN THE MILITARY, I BELIEVE THAT LOVE THINKS PROGRAMS WILL HELP INDIVIDUALS, COUPLES, & FAMILIES COPE WITH WHATEVER CIRCUMSTANCES THEY FACE.**”

**US AIRMAN, ULTIMATE SPIRITUAL R&R INSTRUCTOR**

### PROGRAMS OFFERED

PICK a Partner Program: for singles

Couple LINKS: for committed couples

Ultimate Spiritual R&R: for all individuals

Our Home Runs: for families

Counseling with the RAM: for Lay & Professional Counselors

### about Love Thinks

Love Thinks, LLC is dedicated to creating educational programs that teach how to build, strengthen, and manage relationships. You will find that the Relationship Attachment Model (RAM) provides a picture of love and closeness. When you understand what produces the feelings of love in your relationship, and how these dynamics work together, then you can manage your relationship, healing hurts and deepening intimacy.

Four programs use the RAM. The first is the PICK a Partner, aka *How To Avoid Falling for a Jerk(ette)* which teaches how to build a healthy relationship that keeps the head and heart working together. The *Couple LINKS* Program empowers couples to be active relationship managers and work together to keep their relationship strong and resilient. *Ultimate Spiritual R&R* teaches individuals how to use the RAM to develop their spirituality in ways that increase their ability to resiliently relate with three domains of life: self, others, and circumstances. And *Our Home Runs* helps families know how to stay connected while successfully running their homes.

“  
**THE RAM IS AN EXCELLENT TOOL. THE BEST TRAINING I’VE EVER RECEIVED. I HAVE A MASTERS IN COUNSELING & NEVER RECEIVED INSTRUCTION SO PRACTICAL, RELEVANT, AND USEFUL.**”

**CLINICAL COUNSELOR, LOVE THINKS INSTRUCTOR**

For pricing and information about keynote, workshop, or live training please email [info@lovethinks.com](mailto:info@lovethinks.com) [www.lovethinks.com](http://www.lovethinks.com)



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