

STRENGTHENING MARRIAGE



INSTRUCTOR'S GUIDE

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THE LORD HAS PROMISED
ETERNAL FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS TO
THOSE WHO MAKE AND KEEP
TEMPLE MARRIAGE COVENANTS.



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THE FAMILY

A PROCLAMATION TO THE WORLD

THE FIRST PRESIDENCY AND COUNCIL OF THE TWELVE APOSTLES OF THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS

WE, THE FIRST PRESIDENCY and the Council of the Twelve Apostles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, solemnly proclaim that marriage between a man and a woman is ordained of God and that the family is central to the Creator's plan for the eternal destiny of His children.

ALL HUMAN BEINGS—male and female—are created in the image of God. Each is a beloved spirit son or daughter of heavenly parents, and, as such, each has a divine nature and destiny. Gender is an essential characteristic of individual premortal, mortal, and eternal identity and purpose.

IN THE PREMORTAL REALM, spirit sons and daughters knew and worshiped God as their Eternal Father and accepted His plan by which His children could obtain a physical body and gain earthly experience to progress toward perfection and ultimately realize his or her divine destiny as an heir of eternal life. The divine plan of happiness enables family relationships to be perpetuated beyond the grave. Sacred ordinances and covenants available in holy temples make it possible for individuals to return to the presence of God and for families to be united eternally.

THE FIRST COMMANDMENT that God gave to Adam and Eve pertained to their potential for parenthood as husband and wife. We declare that God's commandment for His children to multiply and replenish the earth remains in force. We further declare that God has commanded that the sacred powers of procreation are to be employed only between man and woman, lawfully wedded as husband and wife.

WE DECLARE the means by which mortal life is created to be divinely appointed. We affirm the sanctity of life and of its importance in God's eternal plan.

HUSBAND AND WIFE have a solemn responsibility to love and care for each other and for their children. "Children are an heritage of the Lord" (Psalms 127:3). Parents have a

sacred duty to rear their children in love and righteousness, to provide for their physical and spiritual needs, to teach them to love and serve one another, to observe the commandments of God and to be law-abiding citizens wherever they live. Husbands and wives—mothers and fathers—will be held accountable before God for the discharge of these obligations.

THE FAMILY is ordained of God. Marriage between man and woman is essential to His eternal plan. Children are entitled to birth within the bonds of matrimony, and to be reared by a father and a mother who honor marital vows with complete fidelity. Happiness in family life is most likely to be achieved when founded upon the teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ. Successful marriages and families are established and maintained on principles of faith, prayer, repentance, forgiveness, respect, love, compassion, work, and wholesome recreational activities. By divine design, fathers are to preside over their families in love and righteousness and are responsible to provide the necessities of life and protection for their families. Mothers are primarily responsible for the nurture of their children. In these sacred responsibilities, fathers and mothers are obligated to help one another as equal partners. Disability, death, or other circumstances may necessitate individual adaptation. Extended families should lend support when needed.

WE WARN that individuals who violate covenants of chastity, who abuse spouse or offspring, or who fail to fulfill family responsibilities will one day stand accountable before God. Further, we warn that the disintegration of the family will bring upon individuals, communities, and nations the calamities foretold by ancient and modern prophets.

WE CALL UPON responsible citizens and officers of government everywhere to promote those measures designed to maintain and strengthen the family as the fundamental unit of society.

This proclamation was read by President Gordon B. Hinckley as part of his message at the General Relief Society Meeting held September 23, 1995, in Salt Lake City, Utah.



GUIDELINES FOR THE INSTRUCTOR

Strengthening marriage is essential, especially in these latter days when confusion and temptation abound. Speaking of our time, President Gordon B. Hinckley said: “The family is falling apart all over the world. The old ties that bound together father and mother and children are breaking everywhere. . . . Hearts are broken; children weep. Can we not do better? Of course we can.”¹

This course was created in response to the need for stronger family relationships and was written to benefit as many people as possible. It contains gospel principles and skills to help participants improve their marriages.

Use this instructor’s guide in conjunction with the resource guide for couples. It provides supplemental information to help you conduct class sessions successfully.

Several ideas in this introduction and in the appendix were adapted from the instructor’s guide of *Principles of Parenting*, a series written by H. Wallace Goddard and published by the Alabama Cooperative Extension Service.²

ADMINISTERING THE COURSE

The course should typically be taught to groups of 20 or fewer participants by professionals at LDS Family Services agencies or by volunteers in wards and stakes. A typical course will last six to eight sessions. Sessions are usually 90 minutes in length. *Strengthening Marriage: Resource Guide for Couples* includes six topics that may be used in group meetings. Although you will select the topics that you think will best address the needs of class members, you should teach session 1, “Applying Gospel Principles,” as the first session of the course. To be addressed adequately, some topics may require two or more class sessions.

Consider the following suggestions for administering the course:

- Follow agency guidelines for charging group fees when the course is sponsored by an agency of LDS Family Services. When the course is sponsored by a stake or ward, the fee should cover only the cost of materials. Participants should pay the fee at the beginning of the course to help encourage attendance.
- Encourage couples to attend sessions together to foster harmonious relationships. The principles they learn can draw them together when they both participate, but these principles can become a wedge if one person is uninvolved or unsupportive.
- Keep track of the number of sessions attended by each participant by taking roll each time you meet (see page 66 in the appendix).

- Contact the nearest LDS Family Services agency if you have questions about teaching the course. Agency locations and telephone numbers can be found at www.ldsfamilyservices.org.

ANNOUNCING THE COURSE

When you share information about the course, describe what individuals and couples can gain by attending. A list of benefits will more readily motivate couples than a list of topics to be discussed.

The benefits of the course are many. Individuals who participate will learn how to resolve conflict, foster greater intimacy and trust, and make marriage a priority so they can enjoy greater happiness together. They will learn to listen and to share sensitive and painful feelings and to handle angry feelings appropriately. They will gain a better appreciation for the eternal significance of the marriage covenant and of the eternal possibilities that come through celestial marriage. They will learn to develop greater unity, equality, and mutual respect.

Consider using the information sheet on page 64 in the appendix to share information about the course.

QUALIFICATIONS TO TEACH THIS COURSE

This course may be taught by any adult who is knowledgeable about relationship skills and the challenges couples face in marriage. Some keys to teaching this course effectively include sensitivity to others, a knowledge of the gospel, and an understanding of the sanctity of marriage and an appreciation for it.

The most important qualification for teaching this course is your personal preparation to receive the guidance of the Holy Ghost. The Lord said, "The Spirit shall be given unto you by the prayer of faith; and if ye receive not the Spirit ye shall not teach" (D&C 42:14). Most people have had the experience of stumbling through a lesson in which thoughts seem disconnected and the message is lost on a disinterested audience. Contrast those experiences with the times when the Spirit was present, when information and impressions came to mind, when words flowed more readily and the Spirit communicated truth to the hearts and minds of others.

EFFECTIVE TEACHING

You will be most effective as a teacher as you seek inspiration and as you bring your own knowledge, ideas, experiences, and personality to the class. When you teach by the Spirit, you will help participants reflect on their own experiences and learn how to improve their marriages. Consider how you can use your experiences to teach and reinforce the principles and skills. Put your heart into your teaching, and you will find great joy in your interaction with class members.

The wealth of experience of each participant is a great asset to you as you teach the course. Recognize the responsibility of each individual for his or her marriage, and share your knowledge and expertise as guided by the Spirit. You should understand that your responsibility is to open doors to new possibilities, not to dictate to course participants. Each class is a collaborative effort, with you and class members sharing ideas and insights and offering support.

As you share your knowledge, experiences, and insights, encourage class members to think about their own experiences and strengths. Help them identify principles that can help them improve, and encourage them as they develop skills to apply those principles. As you practice these same skills, you will grow in your ability as a teacher.

Use the course manual as it is intended, seeking guidance from the Spirit in determining what to teach and how to teach. After prayerfully considering the principles in this manual, organize your presentation by considering what individual class members need to learn about the subject you are teaching. Try asking yourself, "What do class members need to learn today?" You will likely come up with one or two main ideas. Then consider what supporting ideas will help class members understand the main ideas. Once you have identified a main idea and supporting ideas, determine the best way to present them. The following teaching strategies may help you as you plan.

Using Stories to Illustrate a Principle

To begin a session, you might write the main idea or principle on a chalkboard and then tell a story that illustrates it. Stories are effective because they can touch hearts and change lives; they can illustrate abstract principles and make them easier to understand. Life is made up of stories, and people easily remember stories and the principles they teach.

The Savior taught powerfully through the use of stories. Try to keep the stories you tell short and as simple as possible. Be careful not to tell too many personal stories. They may invade the privacy of your spouse and offend others as well.

Class members will have difficulty relating to personal stories if your marriage seems too perfect. Too many of such stories may discourage class members in their own efforts to change. If it seems appropriate, share some stories about challenges you have faced and struggles you have had as well as stories about your successes. When you share these stories, explain what you have learned from those experiences. Be positive and explain what you have done to improve. If your stories disclose too many problems, you may lose credibility and participants may get the idea that the principles you teach do not work.

Role Playing

After you have taught class members how to apply a principle in marriage, you might reinforce the principle through role play. The best role playing often occurs when you start by saying, "What usually happens in this situation?" Have someone act it out. The class can then discuss the mistakes couples often make in these situations. After some discussion, you might say: "Let's role-play the situation again, this time applying the principle we've been discussing. Then we'll see what worked and where additional improvement is needed."

This method of training is often an effective way to help individuals and couples change their behavior. Here is a brief outline:

- Teach a principle and how it can be applied to a marriage situation.
- Invite someone to role-play a typical way of responding to the situation.
- Discuss the role play and how couples could apply the principle in the situation.

- Invite someone to role-play how to apply the principle to the situation.
- Discuss the role play and how the principle could be applied more effectively.
- Continue the process of role play and discussion until participants are familiar with effective ways to apply the principle.³

Participants should not be expected to perform perfectly. They may discover that they do some things well but need to improve in other areas. They may also see that they do not have to be perfect right away; they can improve over time. As you observe things they do well, point out their strengths. Other class members may want to role-play the same situation as the session progresses, or they may want to choose one of their own. Participants can continue to practice applying a principle until they understand the skills they need to learn.

Use wisdom when involving participants in role play. It is best to pair only husband and wife together for role play. Where relationships are already in trouble, mixed role play could invite nonmarital attachments that compromise the relationship between a husband and a wife.

If class members seem uncomfortable with role playing, choose other activities to reinforce the principles you teach. For example, you can engage class members in a discussion of how to apply the principle in other situations, either in personal situations or in situations that involve couples they know (without indulging in gossip or disclosing identifying information).

Inviting and Guiding Class Discussion

Discussion is a valuable teaching tool. When you invite discussion, you show that you value the insight and experience of others and that you do not feel you have to know all the answers to every problem. You also show that challenges can be resolved in many ways. Rely on the Spirit to help you teach, and recognize that the Spirit will inspire others as well. Ask class members for their suggestions. They will benefit from hearing a variety of ideas.

Some class members will immediately feel comfortable enough to participate in class discussions. Others are more reserved and tend not to offer their opinions and insights. The course will be most meaningful for individuals if they have an opportunity to participate. Other class members will benefit from their insight as well. Make the class environment safe by showing respect for all class members. Show that you value the opinion and experience of each individual, and do not permit anyone to make fun of the comments of others.

The following guidelines will help you invite and guide class participation and will help make the class environment comfortable for class members.

1. Set clear ground rules to help each person feel safe in participating. Include the following:
 - **Confidentiality.** Personal information shared in the class remains in the class.
 - **Brevity.** Comments from participants should be brief.
 - **Balance.** Participants may speak as often as they wish as long as they allow other participants to have an equal opportunity.
 - **Patience and kindness.** Individuals will need time to learn and integrate new skills. Participants should be patient and kind with each other and with themselves.

- **Encouragement.** Participants should encourage each other as they apply course information in their lives.
 - **Forgiveness.** Everyone makes mistakes, even after being taught new ways of doing things. Each class member needs to understand the importance of forgiving oneself and others.*
2. Ask questions that invite opinions rather than a single correct answer. For example, you could ask, “What do you think are some of the most important qualities of a good husband or wife?” instead of “What is the most important quality . . . ?” People will be more willing to share their ideas when they know you are not searching for just one response.
 3. Respect everyone’s comments. Consider writing a short summary of each comment on the board, showing that you acknowledge what was said. Give sincere compliments, such as “These are great ideas.” Thank those who offer comments, even when a comment may be questionable. While taking care to be respectful, ensure that no false or misleading concepts are accepted as being factual.
 4. Tactfully direct questions to others when one person tends to dominate a discussion. This redirection is not always easy because some participants want to talk extensively about their marriage problems. While their intentions may be good, you should not allow them to use up needed instruction time or deprive others of a chance to share their experiences. Listen carefully and acknowledge feelings, but move the focus to other class members. You could say something like this: “That sounds like it has been a real challenge for you. I’ll be interested to know how the principles and skills you learn during this workshop help you. Who else has a situation or challenge to share?” or “You have raised some difficult questions that might be better addressed in later sessions.”
 5. Some participants may recommend unacceptable behavior. Rather than condemn the approach and cause embarrassment, help the person explore new ideas. You may say: “That sounds difficult. I’ll share some ideas later on that subject that you may find particularly helpful. The class also will have some ideas.” Do not debate with class members about different approaches.
 6. When participants feel safe, valued, and respected, you can help them become more sensitive to each other’s feelings. As they describe experiences they have had, ask questions such as “If you were your spouse in that situation, what do you think you would have felt?” “Why might that have been particularly difficult for your spouse?” or “If you had experienced the situation, how do you think you would feel?” Ask these questions in a nonaccusatory way. As individuals relate the feelings of their spouse to their own experiences, they may begin to understand their spouse better.
 7. Ask questions that help you assess the needs of class participants. Guide the discussion in ways that are relevant to their needs. Adapt the program and learning activities to their abilities.
 8. Have the participants identify situations in which they behave improperly. Have them discuss and write a plan for responding differently in those situations.
 9. Use appropriate humor and be enthusiastic and energetic.
 10. Break up lecture time with a variety of activities—invite class discussion, tell a story, or have a class activity to keep the pace lively.
 11. After each session, thank those who have participated.

* Colored text indicates information available in *Strengthening Marriage: Resource Guide for Couples*.

Following a Schedule

Discussion can sometimes become so dynamic and interesting that you may have difficulty moving the class on to the next activity. Once class members have understood a principle and know how to apply it, additional discussion may waste time you need for other activities. Redirect the discussion or move on to the next activity when it is time to do so.

A schedule written on the board can sometimes help you maintain a good pace. The schedule could be as detailed or as general as is useful. You could write something like the following:

7:00 to 7:15—Review of past concepts and learning activities

7:15 to 7:30—Need for conflict resolution skills

7:30 to 7:45—Steps in conflict resolution

7:45 to 8:30—Practicing conflict-resolution skills⁴

If you are ready to move to the next subject of instruction and class members still want to discuss the previous subject, you might point to the schedule and say: “You have some great ideas and insights. Maybe we can discuss them later. For now, let’s go to the next topic.” However, if you feel that class members will benefit from further discussion on a topic, you can change the schedule.

Using Media

When it is appropriate, select short media segments from CDs, DVDs, or videocassettes to help you teach concepts and to focus the attention of class members. It is recommended that Church-approved media be used. Short segments are better than long ones in holding the interest of participants. Make sure that you do not violate any copyright laws. If you have questions about usage, call the Church Intellectual Property Office at 1-801-240-3959.

Modeling What You Teach

The goal of this course is to teach effective skills and encourage individuals to use those skills to strengthen their marriages. The class setting is a good opportunity for you to model, as well as teach, good principles, attitudes, and skills. Teach individuals to be kind and gentle by treating them with kindness. Be sensitive, empathetic, and caring, especially when participants need redirection. Use good communication skills. Some individuals seldom encounter someone who will listen to them carefully. The way you interact with them may be as significant as the information you provide. Your positive example can help them change the way they relate to each other in marriage.

Some class members may, on occasion, be frustrated or even angry and hostile. Your manner of response may make all the difference in how much these class members gain from the course. As you respond with kindness, you will demonstrate good listening and problem-solving skills. Do not allow someone who is angry to take over or to dominate class interactions.



STARTING AND ENDING THE COURSE

The suggestions that follow will help you begin and end the course effectively.

Getting Started

To help the first class go smoothly, you may want to do the following:

- If the building is unfamiliar to class members, consider placing signs to mark the way to the classroom and to restrooms.
- Bring copies of *Strengthening Marriage: Resource Guide for Couples* for the participants. You could also have name tags and markers or pens available so class members can make name tags and wear them until they get to know each other by name.
- If the class is sponsored by an agency of LDS Family Services, give participants the agency's telephone number so they can call if they have questions.

Be sure to allow 15 to 30 minutes at the beginning of subsequent sessions to review the concepts and learning activities that were presented in the previous session.

Follow-up and Evaluation

During the last session, you may want to do the following:

- Distribute copies of the Program Evaluation Form (see page 67 in the appendix), and have each participant complete it.
- Recognize the efforts and progress of participants. (Page 68 in the appendix contains a certificate that you may want to use.)

NOTES

1. In Conference Report, Oct. 1997, 94; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1997, 69.
2. "Parent Educator Training: A Guide for Instructors," *Principles of Parenting*, Circular HE-711, Alabama Cooperative Extension Service, Auburn University, Alabama.
3. Outline adapted from "Parent Educator Training," page 8.
4. Adapted from "Parent Educator Training," page 6.



WITH DISCIPLESHIP COMES DIVINE
GUIDANCE IN ALL ASPECTS OF LIVING,
INCLUDING HOW TO BE A GOOD
HUSBAND OR WIFE.





APPLYING GOSPEL PRINCIPLES

SESSION OBJECTIVES

During this session, help participants:

- Understand the possibilities for peace and happiness in marriage.
- Have greater hope that they can achieve happiness as they apply the principles of the gospel in their marriages.
- Begin to apply these four principles to strengthen their marriages:
 - Abide by gospel principles.
 - Commit to stay married and resolve differences.
 - Keep covenants.
 - Try to improve each day.

THE FOUNDATION FOR HAPPINESS IN MARRIAGE

President Ezra Taft Benson taught: “Marriage . . . is the most glorious and most exalting principle of the gospel of Jesus Christ. No ordinance is of more importance and none more sacred and more necessary to the eternal joy of man. Faithfulness to the marriage covenant brings the fullest joy here and glorious rewards hereafter.”¹

Couples can strengthen their relationships and keep their families safe by following the counsel given in the proclamation on the family.² They can find solutions to the problems they face by studying the teachings of the Savior and His servants and by praying diligently for the Lord’s guidance, thereby establishing their marriage relationship on the foundation of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Through prayer, they can receive strength to keep their covenants and to work together. They can repent of bad habits and forgive each other. Couples can also learn problem-solving and communication skills to resolve disagreements and avoid potential conflicts.

The Breakdown of Family Life

President Hinckley warned of the breakdown in family life: “The family is falling apart all over the world. . . . Hearts are broken; children weep.”³ When faced with problems and challenges in marriage, some individuals become discouraged and want to give up. Many others commit themselves to their marriage relationship, work on resolving their problems, and enjoy peace, happiness, and fulfillment in marriage.

While the possibility of achieving happiness is great, many people struggle with frustration, unhappiness, and despair. Marriage is threatened from the outside by

social policies and practices and the rush of everyday life. It is threatened from the inside by bad habits, misunderstanding, and pride. Serious problems are not easily overcome, and some couples seem to struggle endlessly over the same problems that have undermined their relationships for years. Recognizing the threat to families, the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve warned in the family proclamation that “the disintegration of the family will bring upon individuals, communities, and nations the calamities foretold by ancient and modern prophets.”⁴

These calamities are readily apparent in society. Couples who once thought divorce was the best solution for an unhappy marriage discover that it often causes unforeseen problems. In a study of the long-term effects of divorce, clinical psychologist Judith Wallerstein, along with coauthors Julia Lewis and Sandra Blakeslee, concluded that divorce disrupts the lives of children and affects their behavior and decisions for the rest of their lives.⁵

Linda Waite of the University of Chicago and coauthor Maggie Gallagher found that divorce often has other damaging consequences for children, including increased delinquency and crime, fewer opportunities for education, and more problems with mental and physical health.⁶ They found that children are more likely to be abused by a parent’s boyfriend or girlfriend or by a stepparent than by biological parents.⁷

Challenges in marriage arise from many factors, as President Spencer W. Kimball observed:

“Two people coming from different backgrounds soon learn after the ceremony is performed that stark reality must be faced. There is no longer a life of fantasy or of make-believe; we must come out of the clouds and put our feet firmly on the earth. Responsibility must be assumed and new duties must be accepted. Some personal freedoms must be relinquished and many adjustments, unselfish adjustments, must be made.

“One comes to realize very soon after marriage that the spouse has weaknesses not previously revealed or discovered. The virtues that were constantly magnified during courtship now grow relatively smaller, and the weaknesses that seemed so small and insignificant during courtship now grow to sizeable proportions. . . . The habits of years now show themselves; the spouse may be stingy or prodigal, lazy or industrious, devout or irreligious, kind and cooperative or petulant and cross, demanding or giving, egotistical or self-effacing. The in-law problem comes closer into focus and the relationship of the spouses to them is again magnified.”⁸

Good News for Marriage

President Kimball assured couples that even with these and other challenges marriage can be successful: “While every young man and young woman will seek with all diligence and prayerfulness to find a mate with whom life can be most compatible and beautiful, yet it is certain that almost any good man and any good woman can have happiness and a successful marriage if both are willing to pay the price.”⁹

Though they will have differences and disagreements, couples can successfully resolve them. Problems are best resolved when both spouses strive to overcome them. Unfortunately, both partners are not always equally motivated to save their marriage. When husband and wife have different degrees of motivation, the more devoted partner should take courage in knowing that persistence in applying relationship principles can sometimes bring eventual success to their marriage. One spouse’s love, commitment, and eternal perspective can often sustain the marriage until the

other spouse matures or repents and realizes the loss and damage that would occur if the couple were to divorce. The law of the harvest—“whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap” (Galatians 6:7)—and turning the other cheek (see Matthew 5:39) apply to marriage as well as other relationships.

LEARNING ACTIVITY: EMBRACING GOSPEL PRINCIPLES

Ask participants to write the top two challenges in their marriage. Then ask them to consider ways in which gospel principles can help them resolve these challenges. Encourage them to think about the principles in the family proclamation—faith, prayer, repentance, forgiveness, respect, love, compassion, work, and wholesome recreational activities. Ask them to write one or two practices they are willing to do now to strengthen their marriage, such as praying together each day.

STRENGTHENING MARRIAGE

Individuals will strengthen their marriages as they:

- Abide by gospel teachings.
- Commit themselves to their marriages.
- Keep the covenants that they have made.
- Try to improve each day.

Abide by Gospel Principles

Normal differences between spouses escalate into conflict and disharmony when couples see each other and their relationship in a distorted, deceptive, or untrue way. Couples can overcome these distortions as they learn to follow Jesus Christ.

Elder Neal A. Maxwell of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles observed that the gospel helps people see clearly and with proper perspective: “Because looking at life and others through the lens of the gospel provides eternal perspective, if we look long enough as well as often enough, we can see much more clearly. . . . Such things as a mess of pottage and thirty pieces of silver and moments of sensual pleasure totally disappear from view; so does an improved golf swing or tennis serve when compared with progress toward patience. So does redecorating the front room when placed alongside listening and teaching one’s children.”¹⁰ When people live the gospel, they see more clearly and make more appropriate choices.

Those who earnestly desire eternal marriage and a successful family life should seek to become true disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ. [With discipleship comes divine guidance in all aspects of living, including direction on how to be a good marriage partner and parent.](#) The Savior taught that He will help men and women overcome their weakness:

“If men come unto me I will show unto them their weakness. I give unto men weakness that they may be humble; and my grace is sufficient for all men that humble themselves before me; for if they humble themselves before me, and have faith in me, then will I make weak things become strong unto them.

“Behold, I will show unto the Gentiles their weakness, and I will show unto them that faith, hope and charity bringeth unto me—the fountain of all righteousness” (Ether 12:27–28).

Similarly, the Prophet Joseph Smith taught, “The nearer man [or woman] approaches perfection, the clearer are his views, and the greater his enjoyments, till he has overcome the evils of his life and lost every desire for sin.”¹¹

Discipleship improves perspective and helps individuals see “things as they really are” (Jacob 4:13). Harmful reactions to others are replaced by love, patience, and long-suffering. Adherence to the nine family proclamation principles leads to personal righteousness and closeness to God. Appreciation for family members increases; divine guidance is made possible.

Life brings challenges, many of which come from our associations with others. But, as President Kimball observed, trials can become blessings when we see them from an eternal perspective:

“If we look at mortality as a complete existence, then pain, sorrow, failure, and short life could be a calamity. But if we look upon life as an eternal thing stretching far into the pre-earth past and on into the eternal post-death future, then all happenings may be put in proper perspective.

“Is there not wisdom in his giving us trials that we might rise above them, responsibilities that we might achieve, work to harden our muscles, sorrows to try our souls? Are we not permitted temptations to test our strength, sickness that we might learn patience, death that we might be immortalized and glorified?”¹²

Husbands and wives grow through trials, instruction, faith, personal righteousness, and spiritual guidance. With spiritual guidance, they receive a greater ability to overcome life’s problems and challenges, including those involving family.

LEARNING ACTIVITY: CHANGING PERSPECTIVE

Invite class members to think of their reasons for taking this course. Ask them to write their responses to these questions:

- *What happens in your marriage when you feel as though you are seeing yourself and your spouse as Heavenly Father sees you both?*
- *What happens when the cares and standards of the world seem to dominate your interactions?*
- *What changes do you need to make to repair negative feelings and to maintain a better perspective in your relationship?*
- *What might the Lord know about you that the two of you have not understood, such as your eternal possibilities, your premortal past, the life experiences that have influenced your behavior, and your potential to achieve an eternal marriage?*
- *How might His perspective affect the way you relate to each other?*

Commit to Stay Married and to Resolve Differences

All couples experience challenges in marriage. Unless they are firmly committed to each other, they will lack the foundation to face the storms of life. Committed couples care enough to work out problems.

Catherine Lundell, a marriage and family therapist, told of a couple struggling with serious problems in their marriage. They had planned to divorce by spring if they were unable to solve their problems. In several months of counseling, the couple made little progress and were ready to divorce, but Lundell refused to add her professional

sanction to their decision. Instead, she reminded them of their covenants: “You are the ones who have to decide to break your covenants,” she told them. “You are the ones who will have to live with the decision.” When the couple returned for their next visit, they were “strangely affectionate and responsive to each other.” They explained that after thinking about their situation, they chose to commit themselves to their marriage. Although they still had problems to resolve, their renewed commitment made all the difference in their marriage.¹³

The Savior taught of the commitment that should be in a marriage: “For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife. . . . Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder” (Matthew 19:5–6).

Elder Bruce C. Hafen of the Seventy taught that marriage is a covenant, not a contract. Parties in a contractual arrangement often walk away when problems arise and disrupt the flow of benefits. “But when troubles come to a *covenant* marriage,” Elder Hafen said, “the husband and wife work them through. They marry to give and to grow, bound by covenants to each other, to the community, and to God.”¹⁴

The majority of couples who stay together find that they can work out problems. According to Waite and Gallagher, a high percentage of unhappily married couples who stay together resolve their problems and come to enjoy their marriage: “86 percent of unhappily married people who stick it out find that, five years later, their marriages are happier. . . . Most say they’ve become very happy indeed. In fact, nearly three-fifths of those who said their marriage was unhappy . . . and who stayed married, rated this same marriage as either ‘very happy’ or ‘quite happy.’”¹⁵

This improvement also occurred in very unhappy marriages. Waite and Gallagher noted, “The very worst marriages showed the most dramatic turnarounds: 77 percent of the stably married people who rated their marriage as very unhappy . . . said that the same marriage was either ‘very happy’ or ‘quite happy’ five years later.”¹⁶

The couples who stay together enjoy other benefits as well. Waite and Gallagher found that these couples live longer,¹⁷ acquire more wealth,¹⁸ are healthier and happier,¹⁹ and experience more sexual fulfillment than unmarried people.²⁰

Keep Covenants

Covenants—sacred agreements between God and His children—bring added blessings to help save families. When couples encounter problems, they can remember their covenants to find strength to resolve difficulties. Covenants can help in several ways:

Covenants increase motivation. Through the new and everlasting covenant of marriage, the Lord has pledged that worthy couples shall inherit all that He has (see D&C 132:19–20). The Apostle Paul taught, “Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him” (1 Corinthians 2:9). When husbands and wives remember their covenants, they can find inspiration and motivation to work on their marriages and resolve problems as they occur.

Covenants guide behavior. The covenants people make as they grow in the gospel help strengthen their relationships. At the time of baptism, members covenant to obey God’s commandments and to be like Jesus Christ. *Abiding by the baptismal covenant will resolve most problems in marriage.* Priesthood holders covenant to

magnify their callings and accept direction from the Lord and His servants (see D&C 84:33–39, 43–44). Temple covenants also guide husbands and wives in their relationship with each other.

Covenants bless couples. When establishing His covenant with Abraham, the Lord promised, “I will bless thee above measure” (Abraham 2:9). The scriptures amply demonstrate that the Lord blesses and supports His covenant people. Those who follow Him become heirs to the blessings promised to Abraham. During times of difficulty, the Lord provides guidance and support to worthy husbands and wives. Ultimately, they will receive eternal happiness and exaltation in the celestial kingdom. Elder Bruce C. Hafen observed that through obedience to covenants, individuals will “discover hidden reservoirs of strength” and “deep, internal wellsprings of compassion.”²¹ These blessings strengthen couples during troubled times.

Covenants help save children. The blessings of the marriage covenant affect children as well as parents. Parents who keep this covenant are strengthened in teaching and raising their children. President Brigham Young taught, “When a man and a woman have received their endowments and sealings, and then had children born to them afterwards, those children are legal heirs to the Kingdom and to all its blessings and promises.”²² President Boyd K. Packer of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles reiterated the importance of temple covenants: “We cannot overemphasize the value of temple marriage, the binding ties of the sealing ordinance, and the standards of worthiness required of them. When parents keep the covenants they have made at the altar of the temple, their children will be forever bound to them.”²³ While parents cannot “force salvation upon those who do not want it,”²⁴ the blessings of temple covenants strengthen parents and their children.

A list of some of the covenants Church members make with God is on page 10. You may wish to photocopy this list and distribute it to class members.

Some worthy husbands and wives wonder what happens to their covenant blessings when a spouse violates the covenant they entered into together. When one spouse forsakes the covenant, the faithful partner is not denied the promised blessings. President Gordon B. Hinckley assured those so affected: “We do not look down upon you as failures because a marriage failed. . . . The Lord will not deny you nor turn you away.”²⁵ Likewise, a child retains the blessing of being born or sealed in the covenant even if one or both of the parents forsakes the covenant. A parent who keeps the covenant retains a covenant relationship with the child.

LEARNING ACTIVITY: REVIEWING COVENANTS

Involve class participants in discussing the actions that their covenants require of them when relating to each other and to others around them. Ask them to write down their ideas. Afterward, lead them in discussing specific things they can do to keep their covenants in their daily interactions with their spouses. This could include such things as bearing one another’s burdens, remaining true and faithful to each other, and sacrificing selfish interests for the sake of the marriage. Ask them to write ideas that come from the discussion.

Try to Improve Each Day

Discouragement is one of Satan's greatest tools. Many couples are overwhelmed at the thought of becoming "perfect, even as [our] Father which is in heaven is perfect" (Matthew 5:48). Aware of their own imperfections and faced with everyday family problems, they become discouraged. Eternal family life to them may seem like a fantasy. "I'll never make it," they lament. "Why even try?"

Individuals who give up on themselves, their spouses, or their children open the door for unrighteous influences. But those who seek to follow Jesus Christ can overcome those influences: "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you" (James 4:7–8). With persistence, individuals can turn personal failures into successes if they learn from their mistakes.

Many people have a tendency to compare themselves negatively with others, seeing perfection in others while being painfully aware of their own weaknesses. One therapist recalled working with two female friends who were suffering from depression and a lack of self-confidence. Neither knew the other was receiving help, but both told essentially the same story: "Whenever I go to my friend's home, she always seems to have everything together. Her house is orderly, her children are well-mannered, and she seems to be in control of her life. In contrast, I feel like I'm falling apart. The house is a mess, the kids are terrible, and I struggle just trying to keep my sanity." After a few visits, the therapist realized that the women were talking about each other. Each saw the other as nearly perfect, while each saw herself as very imperfect.

Another common problem in troubled marriages involves husbands or wives who overlook personal faults while focusing upon the real or imagined imperfections of their spouse. Many marriages fail because husbands and wives do this to the point of becoming dissatisfied and unhappy with each other. It is always a good practice to recognize and resolve personal problems rather than to seek to change the behavior of one's spouse.

Couples need to remember that no mortal being is perfect; perfection takes time. Elder Russell M. Nelson of the Quorum of the Twelve advised Church members to try to improve each day, continuing in patience: "When our imperfections appear, we can keep trying to correct them. We can be more forgiving of flaws in ourselves and among those we love. We can be comforted and forbearing."²⁶

LEARNING ACTIVITY: PROGRESSING A STEP AT A TIME

Remind class participants that in the first learning activity, they were asked to identify the top two challenges in their marriages and one or two principles they can work on to strengthen their marriage relationship. Ask them to identify one related behavior they can begin to address (for example, to stop yelling or to start showing more appreciation). If they feel comfortable doing so, invite them to ask their spouses for suggestions of which problem to tackle first. Do not allow this request to provoke arguments, however. Remind them that perfection is a lengthy process that continues in our life beyond mortality, and problems are best addressed one step at a time.²⁷ Have them write the behavioral change they agree to make.



THE JOY OF ETERNAL FAMILIES

God is omnipotent. As individuals seek an eternal perspective on their families, encourage them to [consider for a moment the immensity of God's creations and the purpose for which they were made](#). The Lord told Moses: "Worlds without number have I created; and I also created them for mine own purpose; and by the Son I created them, which is mine Only Begotten. . . . Innumerable are they unto man; but all things are numbered unto me, for they are mine and I know them" (Moses 1:33, 35). One writer marveled at the enormity of the universe: "[The Hubble telescope] pointed at one of the emptiest parts of the sky, focused on a region the size of a grain of sand held at arm's length, and found layer upon layer of galaxies as far as its eye could see, . . . each containing billions of stars."²⁸

The same God who created numberless worlds has declared that the eternal happiness of His children is His work and His glory (see Moses 1:39). He wants us and our families to find happiness in this life and eventually to receive the "riches of eternity" (D&C 78:18). While we may feel insignificant in proportion to the vastness of God's creations, we must remember that we are His children. He has promised to help and bless us as we keep His commandments. [We can receive the blessings that God has in store for us as we obey covenants and follow gospel principles.](#)

The family is central to the gospel plan. President Gordon B. Hinckley taught:

["The Lord has ordained that we should marry, that we shall live together in love and peace and harmony, that we shall have children and rear them in His holy ways. . . ."](#)

“When all is said and done, this is what the gospel is about. The family is a creation of God. It is the basic creation. The way to strengthen the nation is to strengthen the homes of the people.

“I am satisfied that if we would look for the virtues in one another and not the vices, there would be much more of happiness in the homes of our people. There would be far less of divorce, much less of infidelity, much less of anger and rancor and quarreling. There would be more of forgiveness, more of love, more of peace, more of happiness. This is as the Lord would have it.”²⁹

NOTES

1. In Conference Report, Apr. 1949, 197.
2. See “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 102.
3. In Conference Report, Oct. 1997, 94; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1997, 69.
4. “The Family: A Proclamation,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 102.
5. *The Unexpected Legacy of Divorce: A 25 Year Landmark Study* (New York: Hyperion, 2000), xxvii.
6. *The Case for Marriage: Why Married People Are Happier, Healthier, and Better Off Financially* (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 125.
7. *The Case for Marriage*, 135, 159.
8. *Marriage and Divorce* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), 12–13.
9. *Marriage and Divorce*, 16.
10. *We Will Prove Them Herewith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1982), 76.
11. *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, sel. Joseph Fielding Smith (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), 51.
12. *The Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball*, ed. Edward L. Kimball (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1982), 38–39.
13. “Helping Couples in Counseling Remain Committed to Their Marriage,” in *Strengthening Our Families: An In-Depth Look at the Proclamation on the Family*, ed. David C. Dollahite (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 2000), 48–49.
14. In Conference Report, Oct. 1996, 34; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1996, 26.
15. *The Case for Marriage*, 148.
16. *The Case for Marriage*, 148.
17. *The Case for Marriage*, 47–48.
18. *The Case for Marriage*, 111–12.
19. *The Case for Marriage*, 77.
20. *The Case for Marriage*, 96.
21. In Conference Report, Oct. 1996, 35, 36.
22. *Discourses of Brigham Young*, sel. John A. Widtsoe (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1941), 195.
23. In Conference Report, Apr. 1992, 94–95; or *Ensign*, May 1992, 68.
24. Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, comp. Bruce R. McConkie, 3 vols. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1954–56), 2:91.
25. “To Single Adults,” *Ensign*, June 1989, 74.
26. In Conference Report, Oct. 1995, 118; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 88.
27. See Russell M. Nelson, in Conference Report, Oct. 1995, 115–18.
28. William R. Newcott, “Time Exposures,” *National Geographic*, Apr. 1997, 11.
29. In Conference Report, Apr. 1998, 69; or *Ensign*, May 1998, 51.

HOW COVENANTS GUIDE BEHAVIOR

Church members often make covenants with the Lord. This list indicates how some covenants guide behavior. The potential impact of these covenants is tremendous. Abiding by the baptismal covenant alone will resolve most problems in marriage.

Baptism

(See 2 Nephi 31:17–21; Mosiah 18:8–10; D&C 20:37; Articles of Faith 1:4.)

- Take upon oneself the name of Jesus Christ.
- Stand as a witness for Jesus Christ.
- Always keep the commandments.
- Bear the burdens of others; mourn with those who mourn; comfort those who need comfort.
- Show a willingness to serve God throughout life.
- Manifest repentance of sins.

Sacrament

(See 3 Nephi 18:28–29; Moroni 4, 5; D&C 20:75–79; 27:2; 46:4.)

- Renew baptismal covenants.
- Recommit to take upon oneself the name of Christ, always remember Him, and keep His commandments.

Oath and Covenant of the Priesthood

(See Jacob 1:19; D&C 84:33–44; 107:31.)

- Magnify callings by fulfilling priesthood responsibilities.
- Teach the word of God and labor diligently to advance the Lord's purposes.
- Be obedient; obtain a knowledge of the gospel and live according to that knowledge.
- Serve others and work to bless their lives.

Temple Endowment

"Observe the law of strict virtue and chastity, to be charitable, benevolent, tolerant and pure; to devote both talent and material means to the spread of truth and the uplifting of the race; to maintain devotion to the cause of truth; and to seek in every way to contribute to the great preparation that the earth may be made ready to receive her King,—the Lord Jesus Christ" (James E. Talmage, *House of the Lord* [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1962] 84).

Celestial Marriage

- Love one's spouse and remain faithful to him or her and to God through all eternity.
- Live in ways that contribute to a happy family life and work to bless spouse and children.
- "Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth" (Genesis 1:28).



COMMUNICATING WITH LOVE

SESSION OBJECTIVES

During this session, help participants:

- Understand that as they become more Christlike and experience a change of heart, their desire and ability to communicate effectively and appropriately will increase.
- Learn communication skills that will enhance their ability to understand and share painful feelings.
- Understand that Christlike behavior and good communication strengthen marriage.

LOVE AND GOOD COMMUNICATION

Latter-day prophets and apostles have taught that parents should love each other and their children: "Husband and wife have a solemn responsibility to love and care for each other."¹

Communication in marriage includes every thought, feeling, act, or desire shared verbally and nonverbally between husband and wife. Good communication is a manifestation of love. Good communication fosters mutual understanding and respect, reduces conflict, and increases love, unlocking the doors to the highest levels of human intimacy. Every married couple can learn to communicate skillfully.

President Spencer W. Kimball taught the value of good communication:

"There is magic in words properly used. Some people use them accurately, while others sloppily.

"Words are means of communication, and faulty signals give wrong impressions. Disorder and misunderstandings are the results. Words underlie our whole life and are the tools of our business, the expressions of our affections, and the records of our progress. Words cause hearts to throb and tears to flow in sympathy. Words can be sincere or hypocritical. Many of us are destitute of words and, consequently, are clumsy with our speech."²

The Magnitude of Communication Problems

In a national study of 21,501 married couples, psychologist David H. Olson of the University of Minnesota and his associate Amy K. Olson found poor communication to be among the top 10 stumbling blocks to marital satisfaction. Eighty-two percent of the couples wished their partners would share feelings more often. Other responses



“HUSBAND AND WIFE HAVE A SOLEMN
RESPONSIBILITY TO LOVE AND CARE
FOR EACH OTHER AND FOR THEIR CHILDREN.”

“THE FAMILY: A PROCLAMATION TO THE WORLD”



related to communication, though not in the top 10, also ranked high: 75 percent had difficulty asking their partner for what they wanted, 72 percent did not feel understood, 71 percent said their partner would not discuss issues or problems with them, and 67 percent said their partner made comments that put them down.³ The study also revealed “satisfying communication” as the top predictor of happy marriage.⁴

Softening of the Heart

Couples make the greatest progress toward improving their communication skills when they have a contrite heart and a willingness to forgive and ask forgiveness. Individuals can soften their hearts regardless of what their spouses choose to do.

Victor Cline, a psychologist and a member of the Church, observed: “I have found in thirty years of marriage counseling that learning new communication techniques, going to seminars on relationship skills, or reading all of the best books on the subject really won’t help heal marital wounds unless the individuals involved develop a contrite spirit or feel a softening of the heart. This softening of the heart usually needs to take place in both spouses, even though one may be principally at fault for the problems. While you can never force your spouse to change, *you* can change. You can choose to love and forgive no matter what else happens. The result will usually be a change in your spouse’s attitude and behavior as well.”⁵

The scriptures suggest that the way people communicate is related to the kind of people they are. Jesus taught, “Those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart” (Matthew 15:18). James declared in his epistle, “If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body” (James 3:2). Improving communication may require fundamental changes in basic character, in a person’s way of thinking, feeling, and behaving. As followers of Christ, we seek to become like Him, as He commanded when teaching the Nephite disciples: “What manner of men ought ye to be? Verily I say unto you, even as I am” (3 Nephi 27:27).

IMPROVING COMMUNICATION

The following recommendations will help couples improve communication in their marriages.

Eliminate Destructive Ways of Talking to Each Other

In more than 20 years of studying interactions between couples, psychologist John Gottman identified four patterns of communication that often destroy marriages:

- **Criticism:** “Attacking someone’s personality or character . . . usually with blame.”
- **Contempt:** Insulting or demeaning the spouse; indicating by words or actions that one believes the spouse to be “stupid, disgusting, incompetent, a fool.”
- **Defensiveness:** Responding defensively to complaints, criticism, or contempt by making excuses, denying, arguing, whining, or counter-blaming rather than trying to solve the problem.
- **Stonewalling:** Withdrawing physically or emotionally from the relationship when disagreements occur, becoming like a stone wall.⁶

Some husbands and wives unthinkingly say and do things that hinder sharing and listening. Bad habits become deeply ingrained through years of repetition and

reinforcement. Occasionally, problems are more extensive, involving spouses who intentionally obstruct communication because of anger, negative thinking, personal frustration, viciousness, or indifference. These couples may need ecclesiastical and professional help to resolve problems. If couples have communication stumbling blocks in their marriage, they should examine the way they talk to each other and why they talk that way, resolving any underlying problems.

In addition to eliminating destructive patterns of communication, couples should increase positive communication. “[The] magic ratio is 5 to 1,” said Gottman. When positive feelings and interactions occurred five times more often than negative interactions and feelings “the marriage was likely to be stable.”⁷

In his study, Gottman found that contented, happy couples were much more positive toward each other. These individuals interacted positively by:

- Showing interest in what their spouse had to say.
- Being affectionate through acts of tenderness, holding hands, and expressing love.
- Showing they cared through small acts of thoughtfulness, occasional gifts, and telephone calls.
- Showing appreciation by expressing thanks, giving compliments, and expressing pride in their spouse.
- Showing concern when their spouse was troubled.
- Being empathic, showing they understood and felt what their spouse was feeling.
- Being accepting, letting their spouse know that they accepted and respected what she or he said, even when they disagreed with it.
- Joking around and having fun together without being offensive.
- Sharing joy when excited or delighted.⁸

Although the ultimate objective is to eliminate negativity altogether, couples should try in the meantime to increase their positive interactions and decrease their negative interactions.

LEARNING ACTIVITY: IDENTIFY INTERACTION PATTERNS

Ask participants to do the following:

- Estimate their ratio of positive-to-negative interactions with their spouse.
- See if their spouse agrees with their estimated ratio of positive-to-negative interactions, unless they anticipate it will create a conflict.
- Find out what their spouse considers to be typical positive interactions. Write down what these interactions are.
- Write down any destructive patterns of communication they typically engage in, such as criticism, contempt, defensiveness, and stonewalling.

Recognize and Accept Differences

Some people behave as if they believe their spouse should think and act as they do. As couples recognize, accept, and appreciate their differences, they will be more understanding and responsive to each other’s needs and ways of doing things.

Many popular and scholarly books and articles have been written about the differences between men and women, particularly about styles and modes of communication. In reality, any two people may differ in significant ways. Some writers and lecturers argue that females place greater value on interdependence, connection with others, and cooperation and that they address problems through consensus, listening, asking questions, disclosing feelings, and sharing problems of their own. These people also claim that men generally place greater value on independence, freedom, status, and authority and that they address problems by acting on them, giving advice, reassuring others, and finding solutions.

While these books and articles are interesting and generally popular, the differences described vary from person to person and from culture to culture. Societal trends, familial upbringing, and occupational pursuits influence the way individuals think and how they communicate with and relate to others. Husbands and wives should understand that their spouses are individuals who have different ways of communicating. These differences need not be a hindrance; a difference of communicating or a different way of responding to a particular situation can become a strength in a marriage relationship.

LEARNING ACTIVITY: UNDERSTANDING DIFFERENT CONVERSATION STYLES

To help couples foster a better understanding of differing communication styles, ask them to engage in a “feelings only,” rapport-building conversation for two or three minutes (addressing problems through consensus, listening, asking questions, disclosing feelings, and sharing problems of their own). Afterward, ask them to talk in a solution-focused style for two or three minutes (giving advice, reassuring, finding solutions, taking action). The topic can be a real or imagined safe issue, not one that will trigger a conflict between the couples.

Discuss with class participants whether they had difficulty adopting one of the communication styles. Ask them to write their description of their own communication style and that of their spouses. Afterward, invite them to share and discuss their observations about styles, seeing if they agree.

Examine Destructive Thought Patterns

Individuals find it difficult to communicate positively if they have negative thoughts about their husband or wife. Negative thoughts are frequently distorted—the individual might magnify personal strengths while focusing on the weaknesses of his or her spouse. Participants can begin to correct any distorted thoughts they might have by challenging their thoughts—looking for evidence that they are inaccurate, viewing objectionable behavior in a different light, and considering that the spouse may have good intentions for his or her behavior. They can also pray that the Lord will help them see the spouse as He sees that person. Sometimes if one spouse speaks kindly to the other, both will develop positive thoughts and feelings.

Gottman found that destructive thoughts often involve feelings of innocent victimhood or self-righteous indignation; these thoughts can occur separately or together.⁹ People who are innocent victims often fear their spouses; they feel unfairly accused, mistreated, or unappreciated. Some become so fearful that they do not dare defend themselves. They feel justified in being victims, and they use their victimhood as an excuse to avoid responsibility for saving their marriages.¹⁰

The self-righteously indignant feel “hostility and contempt” toward their spouses for hurting them. They feel that their anger is justified and sometimes want revenge. Individuals who feel hurt or angry often do not want to use good communication skills. They do not care about listening or trying to understand.¹¹

While it is okay for individuals to consider their own needs in marriage, some husbands and wives are self-centered and focus their thoughts on self-gratification. They may blame others rather than accept responsibility for problems, or they may lie about or deny their actions. They may spurn or belittle their spouse for not meeting their selfish expectations.

Sometimes individuals feel so overwhelmed by their own or their spouses’ negativity that they become hostile, defensive, or withdrawn and begin stonewalling. Constructive communication then becomes almost impossible.

**LEARNING ACTIVITY:
IDENTIFYING DESTRUCTIVE THOUGHT PATTERNS**

Ask participants to consider whether they have negative thoughts and feelings that diminish their desire and ability to work on improving their marriages. If they have these kinds of thoughts, ask them to make a plan to resolve them, applying the suggestions above as needed. Some husbands and wives may need to discuss their feelings in order to resolve them. If they believe they can discuss their feelings without becoming contentious or confrontational, suggest that they schedule a place and time during the week for that purpose. Otherwise, they may need to wait until they have acquired better communication and problem-solving skills. Advise the couples to consider marriage counseling if negative thoughts seem overwhelming and if these thoughts are related to serious relationship problems.

Use Good Communication Skills

Wives and husbands can practice and strengthen skills that will help them communicate better. As they replace old destructive patterns of communication with new and better ways of relating, they create a better environment that can lead to the change of heart described earlier in this session. Skillful communication involves taking risks, however. When husbands and wives open the channels of communication, they begin to feel safer in sharing sensitive feelings they were afraid to talk about before. Differences may surface; conflicts may arise. The resulting pain, however, is usually temporary. Relationship wounds begin to heal when couples are able to understand and accept each other’s feelings. Problems can be resolved when couples are able to discuss underlying issues with skill and sensitivity.

The following skills will help couples improve communication.

Be interested and attentive when the spouse is talking. Individuals can show nonverbal interest by maintaining eye contact without staring and by paying attention instead of seeming distant or bothered.

When a spouse is troubled or needs to talk, the husband or wife needs to set aside personal interests and listen. If other obligations make listening impossible, the couple should arrange to continue the conversation as soon as possible. When listening to each other, couples should be aware of their own body language and should show that they are listening by nodding or saying, “I see,” “Uh-huh,” and so on. Elder Russell M. Nelson of the Quorum of the Twelve counseled: “Taking time to talk is essential to keep

lines of communication intact. If marriage is a prime relationship in life, it deserves prime time!"¹²

Ask questions. An individual can invite his or her spouse to talk by asking questions such as "Something seems to be troubling you. Do you want to talk about it?"

Some husbands and wives avoid conflict and hesitate to say what they think and feel, fearing to provoke disagreement. For that reason, they may not share sensitive matters with each other. However, feelings are unlikely to change unless they are discussed. Individuals can help their spouse discuss these sensitive matters by asking about their thoughts and feelings with a genuine desire to understand their point of view. Once they both understand each other's perspectives, they can begin to work on solutions.

Listen actively. Good listeners occasionally rephrase what they hear. When they rephrase, they show interest and a desire to understand the message of the person who is speaking. If they didn't hear it accurately, the speaker can clarify it.

Husbands and wives can say, "Let me restate what I think you said to make sure I understand it correctly." (For example: "You're hurt that I didn't talk to you before buying the sofa. You felt left out and ignored. Is that right?" or "You feel like I broke an unwritten rule about making big decisions together when I bought that sofa, and it hurt you. Is that right?") Individuals can repeat their understanding of the message until the other person is satisfied that the listener has understood. Listeners should not interject their own biases to make a point. They should accept the other person's thoughts and feelings and not criticize or judge them.

Share intentions. When approaching a difficult topic, individuals can first share their intentions—what they want for the relationship, for their spouse, and for themselves. If their intentions are good, their spouse will understand that they want to resolve the issue, not criticize or complain.

When problems arise in marriage, sometimes the person who is upset will only vent negative feelings or engage in destructive ways of communicating such as criticism, contempt, defensiveness, or stonewalling. When this behavior occurs, it usually damages the relationship, provoking the spouse to feel rejected, unacceptable, humiliated, sad, hurt, frustrated, or angry. A better method is for husbands and wives to approach a problem with the idea that they will resolve it, not just complain about it. Therefore, they can begin by sharing their intention to resolve the problem. For example: "I want you to know that I love you and that I value our relationship. There is a problem we need to discuss. I want us to resolve the problem so we will continue to feel close to each other and feel good about each other."

Use "I" statements. Individuals should use "I" statements when they are upset, rather than "you" statements.

An "I" statement shares personal feelings and gives the reasons for them (for example, "I feel frustrated when bills aren't paid on time and checks are not entered in the checkbook register") instead of focusing blame on the spouse. "I" statements also convey personal responsibility for feelings (for example, "I feel angry" rather than "you make me angry").

"You" messages convey judgmental, negative, and often distorted information about the spouse (for example, "you are lazy" or "you never clean up after yourself"). "You" statements invite resentment, defensiveness, and retaliation.

LEARNING ACTIVITY: USING LISTENING SKILLS AND "I" STATEMENTS

This activity uses role playing to teach the skills of listening and using "I" statements. Have each couple write the word floor on a piece of paper and decide who will be the speaker and who will be the listener. The speaker holds the piece of paper and "has the floor." Use the scenario below or make one up for this exercise. Instruct the couples to save personal issues until they have more time and better skills.

The speaker has the floor and is to use "I" statements instead of "you" statements to address the issue. He or she should make comments that are fairly short so the listener can paraphrase the comments. The listener should not interrupt the speaker or express disagreement while the speaker has the floor.

The goal is to understand fully the speaker's point of view. If the listener does not understand what the speaker is saying, he or she should ask questions to gather additional information. After the speaker has shared his or her feelings and the listener has accurately paraphrased them, have each couple switch roles. The process described above is then repeated. The listener becomes the speaker and can now share his or her point of view.

After the husband and wife have taken both roles, have them discuss their experiences.

SCENARIO

A couple are concerned that their children are not learning responsible behavior. Although chores have been assigned, the dishes frequently are not washed, rooms are not picked up, beds are not made, yard work is neglected, and so on. The wife would like the husband to take more responsibility in working with the children to ensure that chores are done. The husband works 50 to 70 hours each week, and he feels that his wife needs to be less demanding of him and spend more of her time working with the children. The wife spends more time at home than the husband, but she has a part-time job and a demanding Church calling.

Speak nondefensively and agree with the truth. Individuals should agree with the truth when they receive criticism or blame. When they take responsibility for mistakes, they can calm arguments and increase their credibility. If they deny the truth, they often intensify problems and appear weak and guilty.

Gottman described defensiveness as one of the most dangerous of the destructive ways of communicating. He observed that "it can lead to endless spirals of negativity." Defensiveness includes denying responsibility, making excuses, disagreeing, criticizing, attacking, being cynical or sarcastic, and whining.

In contrast, nondefensiveness involves taking responsibility, acknowledging mistakes, seeking solutions to problems, sincerely agreeing to make changes, and respectfully acknowledging the feelings of the spouse. Gottman noted that couples who learn to be nondefensive will almost certainly improve their marriages: "The single most important tactic for short-circuiting defensive communication is to choose to have a positive mindset about your spouse and to reintroduce praise and admiration into your relationship."¹³

As individuals agree with the truth and learn to speak nondefensively, they can remember the effectiveness of simply saying, "I'm sorry." A sincere apology bridges conflict and soothes feelings of anger and contention.

LEARNING ACTIVITY: SPEAKING NONDEFENSIVELY AND AGREEING WITH THE TRUTH

This activity uses role playing to teach the skills of speaking nondefensively and agreeing with the truth. Have couples use one of the scenarios below or make up one of their own. The scenario should not relate to an issue in their marriage. In their role play, they can decide who will send the message and who will receive it. The sender should say something mildly critical or confrontational, such as "I feel betrayed when you sneak behind my back to play golf." The receiver should practice responding without getting defensive, agreeing with any possible truth in what is said. After a few minutes, couples should switch roles. The sender is to observe how it feels to have someone take responsibility, and the receiver is to observe how it feels to acknowledge imperfection or wrongdoing. Afterward, have the couples discuss the experience.

SITUATION A

A wife has just learned from a friend that her husband has been playing golf in the afternoons when he has told her he is working late. She has discovered he keeps his golf bag in the trunk of the car. She feels betrayed because he lied to her. His attitude is "Why does this upset or hurt her? I've been a responsible husband."

SITUATION B

A husband is upset because his wife, who sells cosmetics, spends many hours visiting customers. When she's home, she continues her work over the telephone. He feels rejected and lonely. He accuses her of caring more for her job than for him. To her, the social contact is very important for her and for the business.

Give honest praise. Honest praise enhances communication and helps individuals feel good about themselves. As Gottman suggested, "Reminding your partner (and yourself!) that you really admire him or her is likely to have a powerful, positive effect on the rest of your conversation."¹⁴ Such praise strengthens relationships.

Clearly state preferences. Writer Susan Page observed that some couples go for years without sharing their preferences or expectations.¹⁵ Some expectations are simple, such as a request to take out the garbage or to carry a plate to the sink after dinner; others are less mundane. Page suggested that uncommunicated expectations can hamper a relationship for years. When expectations are not met, individuals often feel disappointed, frustrated, and angry, even if they have not expressed their desires or expectations. Eventually they may become disillusioned with the relationship.

Common reasons for not sharing desires and expectations include thoughts such as "He should know what I want"; "She'll think I'm being critical"; "I should be content with what I have"; or "I'll never get it anyway, so why ask?" Yet in asking for what they want, individuals show that they take responsibility in the relationship. The asking process generally strengthens the relationship. Even if a request is not granted or creates a conflict, the request will still bring the issue out in the open. Once the issue is expressed, it can be worked on and ultimately resolved.¹⁶

Individuals should use good judgment when asking for what they want, remembering that not all requests are appropriate. They should:

- Clarify in their minds what they want before asking.
- Choose the right time to make the request. The spouse is less likely to be responsive when preoccupied with other matters.

- Be specific; for example, they could say, “Would you please take out the garbage?” instead of “I wish you would be more helpful.”
- Briefly state the request without watering it down as a way to justify it; for example, they could say, “I’d like a good-bye kiss before I go to work,” instead of “I know it’s a lot to ask and sometimes you’re not fully awake, but it would help me feel better if . . .”
- Ask in a nondemanding way. “Would you mind . . .” is a good introductory phrase. Individuals should understand that the spouse has the right to say no, especially if the request is inappropriate.¹⁷

If the request seems appropriate and the individual feels strongly about it and the spouse denies it, the individual can ask again in another way. It may take time for the spouse to understand how much the request means.¹⁸

Examine How You Talk to Each Other (process versus content)

Sometimes couples focus so much on the issues at hand, such as who pays the bills or takes out the garbage (content issues), that they fail to recognize that the way they communicate (the process) is the greater problem. They try to repair communication problems by continuing to do things that do not work, such as yelling, arguing, or lecturing. Rather than helping resolve problems, these things contribute to ongoing contention. *If couples evaluate and change their communication processes, making those processes more effective, they resolve conflict better and gain new perspectives that lead to better interactions.*

One couple sought therapy because the wife feared her husband’s anger. He had slugged a bedroom wall during an argument, breaking the wallboard. In therapy he affirmed that he would never hurt anyone, while she argued that hitting objects could lead to hitting people (content issues).

Rather than allowing the couple to debate endlessly over whether the husband would hit someone, the therapist focused on how they typically handled disagreements, including the one they were currently having. The wife frequently complained to her husband about problems that bothered her. He felt blamed and emotionally overwhelmed. Not knowing what to say, he would stop talking and walk away. She interpreted his withdrawal as a rejection of her feelings. She then followed him from room to room, demanding that he talk with her. Eventually he would explode.

After the couple identified the process, the therapist helped them change their approach to problem solving. The wife learned to share her feelings less intrusively, while the husband learned to listen and respond appropriately to his wife’s feelings.

LEARNING ACTIVITY: EXAMINING COMMUNICATION PROCESSES

Ask couples to think about how they converse about issues, resolve problems, and influence each other’s thinking and behavior. Do they discuss matters harmoniously? Do they criticize, argue, complain, moralize, or dictate or withdraw into silence, submission, or stubborn resistance? Do they respond positively to each other or become defensive? Does their approach work, helping them achieve mutually satisfying outcomes, or does it create additional problems? Do they both feel good about the way issues are discussed? Have them discuss how they can improve the way they talk about problems in their relationship.

COMMUNICATING EFFECTIVELY

Elder Marvin J. Ashton of the Quorum of the Twelve indicated how people could learn more loving communication: “I pray our Heavenly Father will help us to communicate more effectively in the home through a willingness to sacrifice, a willingness to listen, a willingness to vocalize feelings, a willingness to avoid judgment, a willingness to maintain confidences, and a willingness to practice patience. . . . Communication can help build family unity if we will work at it and sacrifice for it.”¹⁹

LEARNING ACTIVITY: SCHEDULING PRACTICE SESSIONS

Invite participants to write the skills they need to work on. Ask them to record the dates and times they will practice. They should devote more time to learning the skills that are most important to them. Instruct them to continue practicing until they become proficient in them. When learning skills, it is best to focus on contrived or minor issues. If couples focus on major issues in their relationship, they may become entangled in conflict and fail to learn the skills adequately.

NOTES

1. “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 102.
2. “Love Versus Lust,” in *Brigham Young University Speeches of the Year* (Provo: Brigham Young University, 1962), 2.
3. David H. Olson and Amy K. Olson, *Empowering Couples: Building on Your Strengths* (Minneapolis: Life Innovations, Inc., 2000), 7, 24. More information is available at www.prepare-enrich.com. This Web site is not affiliated with the Church, and its inclusion here does not imply endorsement.
4. *Empowering Couples*, 9.
5. “Healing Wounds in Marriage,” *Ensign*, July 1993, 18–19.
6. From *Why Marriages Succeed or Fail* by John Gottman, Ph.D. Copyright © 1994 by John Gottman. Reprinted by permission of Simon & Schuster, Inc. NY. Pages 72–95. Quotations from pages 73, 79.
7. *Why Marriages Succeed or Fail*, 57.
8. *Why Marriages Succeed or Fail*, 59–61.
9. *Why Marriages Succeed or Fail*, 105.
10. *Why Marriages Succeed or Fail*, 105–7.
11. *Why Marriages Succeed or Fail*, 107–8.
12. In Conference Report, Apr. 1991, 28; or *Ensign*, May 1991, 23.
13. *Why Marriages Succeed or Fail*, 181.
14. *Why Marriages Succeed or Fail*, 196.
15. *The 8 Essential Traits of Couples Who Thrive* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1997), 152.
16. *The 8 Essential Traits*, 152–53.
17. *The 8 Essential Traits*, 157–58, 160–61.
18. *The 8 Essential Traits*, 161.
19. In Conference Report, Apr. 1976, 82; or *Ensign*, May 1976, 54.



“THERE CAN BE NOTHING OF INFERIORITY OR
SUPERIORITY BETWEEN THE HUSBAND AND WIFE
IN THE PLAN OF THE LORD.”

PRESIDENT GORDON B. HINCKLEY





FOSTERING EQUALITY AND UNITY

SESSION OBJECTIVES

During this session, help participants:

- Understand that husbands and wives are to love and care for each other as equal partners in marriage.
- Remove attitudes and behaviors that foster inequality and unrighteous dominion.
- Understand that the greatest happiness can be found when their efforts are complementary and they unitedly face and overcome challenges.

REACHING OUR FULL POTENTIAL

The First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve Apostles taught that husbands and wives are to “love and care for each other” and “help one another as equal partners.”¹

President Gordon B. Hinckley emphasized the need for unity and equality between husband and wife: “In the marriage companionship there is neither inferiority nor superiority. The woman does not walk ahead of the man; neither does the man walk ahead of the woman. They walk side by side as a son and daughter of God on an eternal journey.”

He taught that husbands and wives will be answerable to the Lord for the way they treat each other: “I am confident that when we stand before the bar of God, there will be little mention of how much wealth we accumulated in life or of any honors which we may have achieved. But there will be searching questions about our domestic relations. And I am convinced that only those who have walked through life with love and respect and appreciation for their companions and children will receive from our eternal judge the words, ‘Well done, thou good and faithful servant: . . . enter thou into the joy of thy lord’ (Matthew 25:21).”²

Jesus Christ gave a model of unity in the intercessory prayer He offered before His Crucifixion. He prayed that those who believe in Him “may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us” (John 17:21).

Elder Henry B. Eyring of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles taught that this ideal of unity is a commandment and a necessity: “The Savior of the world, Jesus Christ, said of those who would be part of His Church: ‘Be one; and if ye are not one ye are not mine’ (D&C 38:27). And at the creation of man and woman, unity for them in marriage was not given as hope; it was a command! ‘Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall

be one flesh’ (Genesis 2:24). Our Heavenly Father wants our hearts to be knit together. That union in love is not simply an ideal. It is a necessity.”³

While serving in the General Relief Society Presidency, Sister Sheri Dew taught that unity is essential to the Lord’s pattern for couples: “Our Father knew exactly what He was doing when He created us. He made us enough alike to love each other but enough different that we would need to unite our strengths and stewardships to create a whole. Neither man nor woman is perfect or complete without the other. Thus, no marriage . . . is likely to reach its full potential until husbands and wives . . . work together in unity of purpose, respecting and relying upon each other’s strengths.”⁴

The Problem of Inequality

In a study of over 20,000 couples, David Olson and Amy Olson found that difficulty in sharing leadership equally was the greatest stumbling block to marital satisfaction. In contrast, they found that three of the top ten strengths of happy couples related to their ability to share leadership.

In this study, 93 percent of 21,501 married couples agreed with the statement, “We have problems sharing leadership equally.” Three of the other top ten stumbling blocks to marital happiness also relate to inequality and lack of unity: “My partner is too negative or critical” (83 percent), “I always end up feeling responsible for the problem” (81 percent), and “Our differences never seem to get resolved” (78 percent).

Using a marital satisfaction scale, the study classified couples as happy (5,153 couples) or unhappy (5,127 couples). The study revealed that at least three of the top ten strengths of happy couples related to sharing leadership: “We are creative in how we handle our differences” (78 percent), “My partner is seldom too controlling” (78 percent), and “We agree on how to spend money” (89 percent).⁵

Unfortunately, some individuals misuse authority and attempt to exert control over spouse and children. While in the Liberty Jail, the Prophet Joseph Smith wrote, “We have learned by sad experience that it is the nature and disposition of almost all men, as soon as they get a little authority, as they suppose, they will immediately begin to exercise unrighteous dominion” (D&C 121:39).

Among Church members, the more common forms of unrighteous dominion involve husbands or wives who try to control decision-making, problem solving, money management, and the teaching and disciplining of children without allowing the spouse to participate equally. The worst forms of unrighteous dominion involve the abuse of spouse and children.

President Hinckley condemned spouse abuse and other demeaning or insulting behavior, particularly by those who hold the priesthood:

“How tragic and utterly disgusting a phenomenon is wife abuse. Any man in this Church who abuses his wife, who demeans her, who insults her, who exercises unrighteous dominion over her is unworthy to hold the priesthood. Though he may have been ordained, the heavens will withdraw, the Spirit of the Lord will be grieved, and it will be amen to the authority of the priesthood of that man. . . .

“My brethren, if there be any within the sound of my voice who are guilty of such behavior, I call upon you to repent. Get on your knees and ask the Lord to forgive you. Pray to Him for the power to control your tongue and your heavy hand. Ask for the forgiveness of your wife and your children.”⁶

FOSTERING EQUALITY

To achieve equality in marriage, husbands and wives may need to change old ways of thinking and behaving, remembering that the joys of unity far outweigh the pains of breaking old habits. By living the gospel of Jesus Christ, husbands and wives can enjoy happy, loving relationships. The Apostle Paul taught that every man should “love his wife even as himself” and that every wife should “revere her husband” (Ephesians 5:33). Jesus declared to His disciples, “A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another” (John 13:34). He also commanded, “Be one; and if ye are not one ye are not mine” (D&C 38:27). The following guidelines will help husband and wife achieve this equality and unity in their marriage.

Love and Respect Each Other as Equal Partners

President Gordon B. Hinckley taught that couples should “walk side by side with respect, appreciation, and love one for another. There can be nothing of inferiority or superiority between the husband and wife in the plan of the Lord.”⁷ President Howard W. Hunter explained: “A man who holds the priesthood accepts his wife as a partner in the leadership of the home and family with full knowledge of and full participation in all decisions relating thereto. . . . The Lord intended that the wife be a helpmeet for man (*meet* means equal)—that is, a companion equal and necessary in full partnership.”⁸

President Hinckley taught that an understanding of God’s relationship to His children helps individuals act appropriately: “When there is recognition of equality between the husband and the wife, when there is acknowledgment that each child born into the world is a child of God, then there will follow a greater sense of responsibility to nurture, to help, to love with an enduring love those for whom we are responsible.”⁹

President Spencer W. Kimball emphasized the importance of unselfishness: “Total unselfishness is sure to accomplish another factor in successful marriage. If one [spouse] is forever seeking the interests, comforts, and happiness of the other, the love found in courtship and cemented in marriage will grow into mighty proportions. . . . Certainly the foods most vital for love are consideration, kindness, thoughtfulness, concern, expressions of affection, embraces of appreciation, admiration, pride, companionship, confidence, faith, partnership, equality, and interdependence.”¹⁰

LEARNING ACTIVITY: RELATIONSHIP AND EQUALITY QUIZ

To help participants evaluate the equality and unity in their marriages, make copies of the marriage equality inventory on page 31 and ask participants to rate themselves and how they believe their spouses would rate them regarding their feelings and attitudes about their relationships, using a scale of 1 to 5. Ask participants to compare their ratings in both categories (self and spouse) with the ratings their spouses have given in both categories. Have them look for similarities and differences in how they see each other. Ask them to write on a separate sheet of paper areas of strength and areas where improvement is needed. You may need to help them evaluate the significance of their ratings.

Ask them to build on strengths in their relationship during the coming weeks and work on areas that need improvement. You may need to suggest ways they can do this. Invite them to share their progress with the class if they believe it would be helpful.

Preside in Righteousness

In the statement quoted on page 24, President Hinckley strongly condemned abuse in marriage. He declared that anyone “who exercises unrighteous dominion over [his wife] is unworthy to hold the priesthood.”¹¹ The Lord taught that relationships are to be guided by righteousness, persuasion, long-suffering, gentleness, meekness, love, and kindness (see D&C 121:41–42).

The First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve described the role of the father in the home: “By divine design, fathers are to preside over their families in love and righteousness and are responsible to provide the necessities of life and protection for their families.”¹² Elder L. Tom Perry of the Quorum of Twelve explained that righteous leadership involves unity and equality between marriage partners: “Remember, brethren, that in your role as leader in the family, your wife is your companion. . . . Since the beginning, God has instructed mankind that marriage should unite husband and wife together in unity (see Genesis 2:24). Therefore, there is not a president or a vice president in a family. The couple works together eternally for the good of the family. They are united together in word, in deed, and in action as they lead, guide, and direct their family unit. They are on equal footing. They plan and organize the affairs of the family jointly and unanimously as they move forward.”¹³

Identify and Rechannel Controlling Behavior

Ordering others around can seem efficient, but it often provokes resentment and resistance, especially among family members. If husbands and wives have any tendency to control others, they can rechannel it and learn to control themselves by controlling what they think, how they act, and what they say. Practicing the behaviors taught in Doctrine and Covenants 121:41–42 will help them resolve these tendencies.

Taking charge is useful in some settings, such as in the workplace. Schoolteachers, corporate executives, day-care operators, police officers, and others must take charge to establish order or achieve work-related goals. But taking charge is not the same as controlling others. Attempts to control others create problems that may take far more effort to resolve than is needed to create good relationships in the first place. Members of the Church—who have covenanted to follow Jesus Christ—have an obligation to do as He did. The Savior taught others. He was persuasive and long-suffering, not manipulative or controlling.

LEARNING ACTIVITY: IDENTIFYING CONTROLLING BEHAVIOR

Ask class members to write down any ways in which they tend to be controlling. If it seems appropriate, suggest that they ask their spouses for their opinions.

Identify and Correct Thoughts and Beliefs about Control

Thoughts underlie virtually all feelings and behavior. A controlling husband may think, consciously or not, “My wife shouldn’t do anything without my permission, and that includes spending money. She’s not very good at budgeting.” A controlling wife may think, “If things are to be done correctly, I have to be in charge. I can’t trust anyone else to do it right.”

When such thinking is challenged and corrected, appropriate behavior is more likely to follow. One way individuals recognize automatic thoughts is for them to ask themselves “why” questions. For example, a wife can ask, “Why don’t I want my husband

to help balance the checkbook?" An automatic thought may pop into her mind: "If he looks at the checks I write, he'll criticize me for how I spend money." Or she may think, "He always makes mistakes, and we can't afford to make a mistake with our finances." In some cases, such thoughts may be accurate, but in many cases they are not. If the wife talks to her husband about her fears, she may discover that the fears are exaggerated and that her husband can be a great help in managing their money.

LEARNING ACTIVITY: CHANGING DISTORTED THINKING

Ask participants to write down the thoughts behind any of their controlling behavior. Have them look for distortions in their thinking, comparing their thoughts and actions to the Lord's standard in Doctrine and Covenants 121:41–42. Help them write corrected thoughts that can guide their thinking and behavior in the future. Class members who are not sure if they have a control problem can seek the perspective of husband or wife, family members, or close friends.

Share Decision-Making

In healthy marriage, husband and wife make some decisions independently and some decisions together. They should make decisions together when the outcome affects them both or when it affects others in the family. Some husbands and wives approach decision making in terms of winning and losing. With a little effort and a willingness to talk, they can make decisions that are acceptable to them both so no one loses.

Husbands and wives often need to change from considering only their individual needs and wants to considering the needs of spouse and children. Decisions made by each spouse nearly always affect the whole family. President Kimball explained:

"Before marriage, each individual is quite free to go and come as he pleases, to organize and plan his life as it seems best, to make all decisions with self as the central point. Sweethearts should realize before they take the vows that each must accept literally and fully that the good of the little new family must always be superior to the good of either spouse. Each party must eliminate the 'I' and the 'my' and substitute therefore 'we' and 'our.' Every decision must take into consideration that there are two or more affected by it. As she approaches major decisions now, the wife will be concerned as to the effect they will have upon the parents, the children, the home, and their spiritual lives. The husband's choice of occupation, his social life, his friends, his every interest must now be considered in the light that he is only a part of a family, that the totalness of the group must be considered."¹⁴

Couples learn to become one as they follow the Lord. Elder Eyring explained that the Spirit unifies: "Where people have that Spirit [the Holy Ghost] with them, we may expect harmony. The Spirit puts the testimony of truth in our hearts, which unifies those who share that testimony. The Spirit of God never generates contention (see 3 Nephi 11:29)."¹⁵ As husbands and wives interact with patience, gentleness, meekness, love, kindness, and knowledge, they will have the companionship of the Holy Ghost, which will unite them and make them one in purpose and in effort. This influence will help them make wise and appropriate decisions.

Also, as husbands and wives make decisions together, they gain confidence that on occasions when an individual must decide alone, the decision will more likely represent the spouse's views as well as the individual's view.

LEARNING ACTIVITY: DETERMINING WHO SHOULD DECIDE

Write the five options below on a whiteboard or blackboard. Explain that in a healthy marriage, a husband and a wife sometimes make decisions independently and sometimes make decisions together. Their decisions can be made in five ways:

- The husband and wife decide together.
- The wife decides after consulting with her husband.
- The husband decides after consulting with his wife.
- Only the wife decides.
- Only the husband decides.

Tell class members that you will read several questions that require decisions. Ask them to choose from the five possibilities to determine how they think a decision should be made regarding each question. Have them write down their answers. Ask husbands and wives not to compare answers for now. Point out that the answers they give may vary due to individual circumstances.

1. Where should the family live?
2. What job should the husband take?
3. How many hours should the husband work?
4. How many children should the couple have?
5. When should they have children?
6. How and when should they discipline their children?
7. Should the wife work outside the home?
8. What job should the wife take if she works outside the home?
9. If the wife works outside the home, how many hours should she work?
10. What hobbies should the wife pursue?
11. How much time should the couple spend with family and friends?
12. How should they spend their money?
13. What fitness program should the husband participate in to stay in shape?
14. When should the couple buy a new car?
15. How should the husband spend a birthday gift certificate?
16. How much money should the couple donate to the Church or charity?
17. How much time should they spend in Church activities?
18. How should the wife discipline a child when the husband is not at home?
19. How much time should each spouse spend pursuing hobbies or interests?
20. Where and when should the family go on vacation?
21. What math class should the wife sign up for?
22. How should a husband spend a day off from work?

Ask husbands and wives to compare their responses. Where they differ, ask them to see if they can come to an agreement. Ask them to find out if the husband or wife wants more or less involvement in decision-making.¹⁶

Be Persistent

Established ways of thinking and behaving are often difficult to change. Old habits are hard to break, but they can be changed through persistent effort.

Change is more likely to occur when husbands and wives are committed in their efforts to bring about a better relationship. Good intentions are often short-lived unless couples make a determined effort to continue the new way of relating. Additional factors that help bring about change include:

- Recognizing the need for change.
- Verbally expressing to the spouse or others a desire to change.
- Making a commitment to the spouse and others on changes to be made.
- Formulating a specific plan, with intermediate steps and goals, to implement positive change in daily life.
- Having a network of support (others who encourage the person in his or her efforts to change).
- Accountability, such as reporting to the spouse, the bishop, or friends on progress toward change.

As husband and wife invest time and energy in fostering unity and equality, they will develop individually and as a couple, and they will bring new life to their marriage. They will also have greater love and respect for each other.

ACTING AND REJOICING AS ONE

When wives and husbands work together in love and unity as equal partners, the results are synergistic—their combined effort is greater than the sum of individual contributions. Elder Richard G. Scott described the strength that comes when the complementary capacities of husbands and wives are unified as the Lord intends: “For the greatest happiness and productivity in life, both husband and wife are needed. Their efforts interlock and are complementary. . . . When used as the Lord intends, those capacities allow a married couple to think, act, and rejoice as one—to face challenges together and overcome them as one, to grow in love and understanding, and through temple ordinances to be bound together as one whole, eternally. That is the plan.”¹⁷

President Ezra Taft Benson taught the importance of service for happiness in marriage and for personal growth: “The secret of a happy marriage is to serve God and each other. The goal of marriage is unity and oneness, as well as self-development. Paradoxically, the more we serve one another, the greater is our spiritual and emotional growth.”¹⁸

LEARNING ACTIVITY: DEVELOPING GREATER UNITY

Have each couple select one of the principles taught in this session that is important to them as they work for greater unity. Ask them to apply the principle individually or as a couple, depending on the need. Suggest that they review the suggestions for changing behavior listed under the heading “Be Persistent.” Ask them to develop a plan to work on applying the principle until they have made the behavioral change. Suggest that they follow up by making a plan to work on the next most important principle.

NOTES

1. "The Family: A Proclamation to the World," *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 102.
2. In Conference Report, Apr. 2002, 64–65; or *Ensign*, May 2002, 54.
3. In Conference Report, Apr. 1998, 85; or *Ensign*, May 1998, 66.
4. In Conference Report, Oct. 2001, 12; or *Ensign*, Nov. 2001, 13.
5. David H. Olson and Amy K. Olson, *Empowering Couples: Building on Your Strengths* (Minneapolis: Life Innovations, Inc., 2000), 6–9. More information is available at www.prepare-enrich.com. This Web site is not affiliated with the Church, and its inclusion here does not imply endorsement.
6. In Conference Report, Apr. 2002, 64.
7. *Teachings of Gordon B. Hinckley* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1997), 322.
8. In Conference Report, Oct. 1994, 68; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1994, 50–51.
9. In Conference Report, Oct. 1998, 93; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1998, 72.
10. "Oneness in Marriage," *Ensign*, Mar. 1977, 5.
11. In Conference Report, Apr. 2002, 64.
12. "The Family: A Proclamation," *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 102.
13. In Conference Report, Apr. 2004, 72; or *Ensign*, May 2004, 71.
14. "Oneness in Marriage," *Ensign*, Mar. 1977, 4.
15. In Conference Report, Apr. 1998, 86.
16. Adapted from Brent Barlow, *Twelve Traps in Today's Marriage and How to Avoid Them* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1986), 99–100, and from Richard B. Stuart, *Helping Couples Change: A Social Learning Approach to Marital Therapy* (New York: Guilford Press, 1980), 266–67.
17. In Conference Report, Oct. 1996, 101; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1996, 74.
18. In Conference Report, Oct. 1982, 86; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1982, 60.

EQUALITY IN THE MARRIAGE RELATIONSHIP

Rate yourself and how you believe your spouse would rate you on each of the relationship items below, using the following scale: 1—Never 2—Infrequently 3—Sometimes 4—Often 5—Always

My Ratings for Myself					Relationship Items	How I Believe My Spouse Would Rate Me on This Item				
Never				Always		Never				Always
1	2	3	4	5	I lead in our family according to scriptural guidelines.	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	I am loving toward my spouse and children, and they feel my love for them.	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	I respect family members and am not angry or abusive.	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	My greatest marital priority is treating my spouse with love and kindness.	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	I live in such a way that my spouse wants to be with me eternally.	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	I treat my spouse as an equal partner.	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	I live in a way that invites the influence of the Spirit to our home.	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	I try to solve problems through counseling together.	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	I try to understand and respect my spouse's thoughts and feelings.	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	I respect my spouse's needs for space and privacy.	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	We decide as equal partners how money is spent.	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	We share domestic responsibilities when we are at home.	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	I try to help my spouse find time and resources to develop talents and pursue interests.	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	We have the same spiritual goals and commitment to live the gospel.	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	We both participate in disciplining the children.	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	We both feel good about the husband's presiding role.	1	2	3	4	5



“WHO CAN CALCULATE THE WOUNDS INFLICTED,
THEIR DEPTH AND PAIN, BY HARSH
AND MEAN WORDS SPOKEN IN ANGER?”

PRESIDENT GORDON B. HINCKLEY





OVERCOMING ANGER

SESSION OBJECTIVES

During this session, help participants:

- Understand the problems and personal costs of anger.
- Understand emotional and biological factors that influence anger.
- Understand ways to overcome anger.

THE PROBLEM WITH ANGER

President Gordon B. Hinckley taught that “temper is a vicious and corrosive thing that destroys affection and casts out love.”¹

Some people find that expressing their anger is satisfying and exhilarating. They feel powerful and superior when they intimidate others. However, anger damages those who give into it. Few people like to be around those who are angry.

The scriptures warn against anger. David instructed the Israelites to “cease from anger, and forsake wrath” (Psalm 37:8). In Proverbs, it is taught that “he that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city” (Proverbs 16:32). The writer of Ecclesiastes wrote, “Be not hasty in thy spirit to be angry: for anger resteth in the bosom of fools” (Ecclesiastes 7:9).

During his mortal ministry, the Savior prophesied that in the last days “many . . . shall hate one another” and “because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold” (Matthew 24:10, 12). He taught the Nephites:

“The spirit of contention . . . is of the devil, who is the father of contention, and he stirreth up the hearts of men to contend with anger, one with another.

“Behold, this is not my doctrine, to stir up the hearts of men with anger, one against another; but this is my doctrine, that such things should be done away” (3 Nephi 11:29–30).

Nephi prophesied that in our day Satan “shall rage in the hearts of the children of men, and stir them up to anger against that which is good” (2 Nephi 28:20). A partial fulfillment of that prophecy is seen in abusive acts perpetrated by husbands against wives, wives against husbands, and parents against children.

The real costs of venting anger at friends, family members, and others are greater than people often think. Elder Lynn G. Robbins of the Seventy described anger as the “thought-sin that leads to hostile feelings or behavior. It is the detonator of road rage on the freeway, flare-ups in the sports arena, and domestic violence in homes.”²

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President Hinckley repeatedly admonished members of the Church, particularly priesthood holders, to control their anger, warning that those who cannot control their anger lose spiritual power: "Any man who is a tyrant in his own home is unworthy of the priesthood. He cannot be a fit instrument in the hands of the Lord when he does not show respect and kindness and love toward the companion of his choice. Likewise, any man who . . . cannot control his temper . . . will find the power of his priesthood nullified."³

Getting angry may help individuals achieve an immediate goal, but the long-term consequences far outweigh any benefits. Costs include the following:

- Loss of the Spirit
- Loss of respect (for self and from others) and of friendship and cooperation from others
- Loss of self-confidence
- Guilt
- Loneliness
- Strained relationships
- Physical, emotional, and spiritual damage to self and others
- Children who no longer believe what parents teach
- Legal action and the loss of personal freedom
- Divorce
- Lost jobs

Anger also causes or worsens health problems such as ulcers, headaches, heart problems, backaches, and high blood pressure. These health problems often occur when people deal with anger in unhealthy ways for prolonged periods of time.

**LEARNING ACTIVITY:
ACKNOWLEDGING THE CONSEQUENCES OF ANGER**

Angry people sometimes deny or minimize the consequences of their anger. Fully acknowledging the costs of anger can increase their motivation to overcome this problem. Ask class members to think of the past few times they have let themselves get angry and to consider the circumstances—how they expressed their anger and who was involved. Ask class members to consider the consequences of their anger and to make a list of the consequences they have experienced for losing their tempers. After they have prepared their lists, suggest that they look at them often. Continually reminding oneself of the consequences of anger can be a powerful motivating force when trying to overcome anger-related problems. As they begin to resolve their anger problems and no longer experience the consequences, they can start crossing items off their lists. This step can be rewarding, helping them recognize the progress they have made.

Kinds, Causes, and Expressions of Anger

Some individuals use anger to intimidate and control others, to feel superior, and to avoid dealing with problems and responsibilities. Anger may also stem from pride and selfishness, such as when a person fails to get his or her way, and from a lack of meekness or patience in the face of provocation. Some individuals become angry when feeling frustrated, hurt, or disappointed.

Some individuals become angry almost without thinking in response to a perceived provocation. This kind of anger is often difficult to control because it occurs so quickly. In other situations, anger builds slowly as an individual perceives ongoing threats, injustice, or mistreatment or experiences a series of provocations. A threat may be physical or emotional. For example, the person may fear bodily harm, humiliation, or loss of esteem to self or others. In all these cases, becoming angry is a choice.

Perceptions of threat or endangerment are often distorted, exaggerated, or imagined. Too often, anger results when a person wrongly judges the intent of others: “He is trying to hurt me”; “She is keeping me from getting what I want”; “He doesn’t care about my feelings”; “She is using me.”

When individuals perceive a threat and respond to someone in anger, their bodies prepare for action. Their blood pressure increases, their muscles tense, their respiration increases, and their minds focus on eliminating the threat or mistreatment. This state of readiness may be released in a single, explosive verbal or physical response to a perceived threat. Or anger-provoking thoughts might increase over time until at last a person explodes in anger, sometimes over a minor situation or event that he or she would normally disregard.

Anger is often expressed in three unhealthy ways—through aggression, internalization, or passive-aggressive behavior.

Aggression. Anger is expressed through:

- Physical violence (hitting, biting, kicking, battering, hair pulling, pinching, slapping, destroying property).
- Emotional and verbal abuse (yelling, name calling, swearing, threatening, blaming, ridiculing, arguing, provoking, intimidating, manipulating, demeaning).
- Sexual abuse (rape, incest, molestation, sexual harassment).

Internalization. Anger is directed toward the self, leading to self-denigration, depression, or self-damaging acts (drinking, drug use, suicide attempts, self-mutilation).

Passive-aggressive behavior. Anger is expressed through indirect actions (tardiness, irresponsibility, stubbornness, sarcasm, dishonesty, irritability, discontentment, criticism, procrastination).

Awareness of distorted perceptions and the physical changes that accompany them provides important keys to controlling anger. The best time for a person to interrupt the anger cycle is upon first noticing an increase in stress. The person can then seek additional information about the perceived threat or injustice, coming to understand it more clearly.

A better understanding may reduce the perception of danger, decreasing the possibility of an angry outcome. Before stress builds, the individual can consider more productive ways to respond to the threat or injustice, a response that will resolve the problem rather than cause it to escalate.

A person who is stressed can also avoid situations that are likely to provoke more stress until he or she is more relaxed and in control. Then the person can work to resolve the situation without anger.

LIVING WITHOUT ANGER

Elder Wayne S. Peterson of the Seventy explained how the example of the Savior can inspire members of the Church to control their anger and other emotional responses:

“Christ set a perfect example of maintaining emotional control in every setting. Appearing before Caiaphas and Pilate, He was buffeted, slapped, spat upon, and mocked by His tormentors (see Matthew 26; Luke 23). The great irony was that they demeaned their Creator, whose suffering was undertaken out of love for them.

“In the face of this unjust abuse, Jesus maintained His composure, refusing to act unkindly. Even on the cross, in the midst of that unspeakable agony, His plea was, ‘Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do’ (Luke 23:34).

“He expects the same of us. To those who would follow Him, He said, ‘By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another’ (John 13:35).”⁴

The following principles have helped many individuals overcome anger problems.

Identify Your Anger Cycle

Angry, violent behavior tends to be cyclical, and the cycle usually repeats again and again. Psychologists have given differing names to phases of the anger cycle, but the essential elements are the same. Anger-management specialists Murray Cullen and Robert Freeman-Longo have described the cycle summarized below.⁵ People are most successful at attempts to control anger during early phases of the cycle, before the physiological build-up occurs.

Pretends-to-Be-Normal Phase. Life runs smoothly, but **anger lurks beneath the surface**, affecting the way the person lives and thinks. Events or situations readily trigger habitual, distorted patterns of thinking. The person rationalizes and justifies these distortions.

Build-up Phase. As the person **focuses on the distorted thoughts**, he or she feels threatened physically or emotionally and begins to react angrily. The person’s thoughts replay familiar themes such as “She is so controlling” or “I do all the work around here.” Physical cues indicate the person is becoming angry (tension, stiffness, tightness, pounding heart, rapid breathing, upset stomach, or a hot or flushed feeling). The person fantasizes about and **makes plans for acting out the anger** and may engage in addictive behavior that feeds the anger (drug and alcohol abuse, overeating, overworking).

Acting-out Phase. Anger is vented on others through yelling at them, **demeaning them, or physically or sexually assaulting them**. Or it may be turned inward through self-denigration, suicide attempts, or alcohol or drug abuse.

Downward-Spiral Phase. The person feels guilt and shame. Defenses emerge, and the person **tries to cover the anger by doing something generically good to prove that he or she is a good person**. The person resolves to control his or her temper. As resolve breaks down, the person cycles back to the “pretends-to-be-normal” phase.

LEARNING ACTIVITY: DETERMINING YOUR ANGER CYCLE

This activity will help class members identify their anger cycle, if applicable. Give copies of the form on page 42 to class members. Have them fill out the form.

Keep an Anger Log

When individuals analyze the circumstances in which they become angry and how they react to that anger, they can learn to deal with their anger more effectively. One way they can learn more about their anger is to keep an anger log. After an episode of anger, they can write the triggering event or person, the date, and the intensity of their anger on a scale from 1 to 10, 1 being mild and 10 severe. They should also record the thoughts feeding their anger, how they dealt with the anger (their success or failure in controlling it), what seemed to help, and what they could do better next time. As they keep an anger log, their awareness of their anger cycle will increase. They can then interrupt anger in the early stages by using the principles taught in this session.⁶

LEARNING ACTIVITY: KEEPING AN ANGER LOG

Instruct class members to fill out an anger log whenever they experience anger. (A sample anger log is on page 43. A blank log is located on page 44. Make a copy of the sample and three or four copies of the blank log for each participant.) This exercise will help individuals understand their anger cycle. It will help them become aware of how they think, feel, and react when situations trigger their anger. They may become conscious of certain behavioral patterns that they need to change. The log will also remind them to begin thinking and acting in ways that can lead to better outcomes.

Defuse Anger-Provoking Thoughts

Mental health professionals have repeatedly emphasized that events in life do not affect people negatively; rather, it is the way that people think about those events that produces the negative effect. Many individuals suffer needlessly because they think about life's challenges in distorted, negative ways. For example, a person makes a critical comment that is intended to be helpful. The listener catastrophically misinterprets the comment: "He thinks I'm stupid. He's trying to humiliate me and make me look bad. I'm not going to let him get away with that." Thoughts create feelings, and feelings influence behavior. Individuals distress themselves and suffer greatly because of inaccurate thinking.

In *The Feeling Good Handbook*, psychiatrist David Burns identifies common ways that people think inaccurately.⁷ They include:

- All-or-nothing thinking. ("I used to think he was a decent man. But today, he showed his true colors.")
- Jumping to conclusions. ("All she cares about is herself. My feelings are irrelevant.")
- Discounting positive experiences while dwelling on negative experiences. ("Did you see the way he turned on me? And after all we've been through together. He doesn't care about me.")

A common theme in these examples is distorted thinking that leads to emotional distress and anger. To control their anger, individuals can look for alternate explanations for the things that provoke their temper. They can challenge distorted thinking by trying to see the precipitating event as a neutral observer would see it. What would a camera record of the anger-provoking incident? Would a camera document the harsh interpretation of events made by the angry person? Usually it would not.

Another way to challenge distorted thinking is to try to view the situation from the other person’s perspective. For example, the person who cuts in front of others in traffic may be late for an appointment. Empathy and charity are effective in preventing an angry response. Individuals can also ask themselves these two questions:

- “What evidence is there that my negative thoughts are accurate?”
- “What evidence is there that these thoughts are *not* accurate?”

As individuals ask themselves these two questions, they usually find little evidence to support a negative interpretation and considerable evidence that a negative interpretation of events is not accurate. When individuals evaluate and correct their thinking in this way, they tend to calm down and accept others more readily.

On those infrequent occasions when negative interpretations are accurate, individuals still need to find better ways to respond than through anger. If attempts to resolve the problem do not work, individuals can follow the Savior’s admonition to “love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you” (Matthew 5:44).

Individuals can think of difficult situations as problems that need to be resolved or as opportunities, not as threatening events that demand a dramatic response. Raymond Novaco of the University of California at Irvine recommended the use of coping statements to defuse anger-provoking thoughts.⁸ Such statements could include: “I’m not going to gain anything by getting mad. If I get angry, I’ll pay a price I don’t want.” Husbands and wives can rehearse these statements mentally when they are not angry so the statements are available to them when a need arises.

**LEARNING ACTIVITY:
CHALLENGING NEGATIVE THOUGHTS**

Ask class members to describe anger-provoking situations they encounter. Then have them write coping statements that can help them avoid getting angry in those situations. Invite them to share some of their statements with the class. Next, have class members visualize each of the anger-provoking situations they identified and practice saying the coping statements to themselves. Ask them to repeat this exercise several times a day for as long as it takes to incorporate the new way of thinking. Mental rehearsal is an effective way of preparing oneself to respond appropriately to real-life situations.

Get Out of Anger-Provoking Situations

As anger increases and chemicals build in the body, the ability to reason and to control behavior decreases. It may help individuals to imagine a thermometer that measures their anger level. If they lose control at 80 degrees, they can learn to get out of the situation before it gets that hot. If they need to leave a situation, they can tell the other person, “I’m getting angry. I need some time to cool down.”

A prearranged signal to stop the discussion is helpful, such as the T (time-out) sign used in athletic events. Both partners must agree to honor the signal once it is given. Time-outs will be successful if both partners can count on finishing the discussion later. Along with the time-out, a wife or husband can suggest a time to resume the discussion, such as in 30 minutes or two hours or on the next day.

Identify Activities that Calm You Down

Many kinds of activities can help individuals calm down when they begin to get angry. Relaxing activities include meditating, working, jogging, swimming, listening to

music, reading a book, or praying. Husbands and wives should take care not to vent their anger or to brood over the incident or incidents associated with it. If they brood or vent, their anger will most likely escalate. If they mentally review the incident again and again, they will most likely continue to exaggerate the situation. Those who vent do the same, justifying in their minds the violent expression of their anger.

To control their anger, individuals can follow the counsel of President Boyd K. Packer of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, who suggested that undesirable thoughts be replaced with sacred music: “As the music begins and as the words form in your thoughts, the unworthy [thoughts] will slip shamefully away. It will change the whole mood on the stage of your mind. Because [the music] is uplifting and clean, the baser thoughts will disappear. For while virtue, by choice, *will not* associate with filth, evil *cannot* tolerate the presence of light.”⁹

Share Underlying Feelings

Anger is often expressed in place of feelings of hurt, fear, embarrassment, or rejection. Some individuals are hesitant to share these feelings, fearing they will show weakness or vulnerability. When they share underlying feelings, however, they often find it easier to resolve conflicts. Other people will be less defensive and more willing to work out problems.

The feelings that underlie anger, such as hurt and fear, are often tender and closely related to a person’s sense of worth and well-being. Many people believe it is safer to be angry than to show those emotions. However, when people honestly share how they are affected by the actions of others, they often find that others respond in a better way and that conflicts are more readily resolved. Anger often subsides and relationships become stronger, as shown in this example:

BETH AND MARK

Whenever Beth attended meetings away from home, she dreaded Mark’s angry response. After taking the Strengthening Marriage class, Mark began to share underlying feelings that were connected to his anger. “I’m afraid you’ll develop a relationship with someone else, and that you’ll leave me, like my mother did to my father,” he confided. Beth responded by assuring Mark of her complete fidelity. Mark felt reassured, and he supported her future activities.

Individuals need to use good judgment in sharing underlying feelings. For example, a person may be confronted by someone who enjoys inflicting emotional or physical punishment. Sharing one’s pain may only encourage further abuse. Nevertheless, there are better ways of responding than to retaliate in anger. The Savior’s admonition to “love your enemies” (Matthew 5:44) has already been mentioned. In some cases, it is best to walk away from a confrontation.

Seek Spiritual Change

The process of coming unto Christ involves a spiritual transformation that results in peaceful, loving behavior. Elder Marvin J. Ashton of the Quorum of the Twelve explained that when we become truly converted “the way we treat others becomes increasingly filled with patience, kindness, a gentle acceptance, and a desire to play a positive role in their lives.”¹⁰

The Book of Mormon describes a “mighty change” of heart that comes through conversion and discipleship—a disposition to “do good continually” (Mosiah 5:2). Paul describes the fruits of the Spirit as “love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness,

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goodness, faith, meekness, temperance” (Galatians 5:22–23). President Ezra Taft Benson promised that change comes through following the Savior: “When you choose to follow Christ, you choose to be changed. . . . Can human hearts be changed? Why, of course! It happens every day in the great missionary work of the Church. It is one of the most widespread of Christ’s modern miracles. If it hasn’t happened to you—it should.”¹¹

Elder L. Whitney Clayton of the Seventy taught that fasting can help those who are seeking to change their basic nature: “We also must remember that genuine fasting fosters strong faith. This is especially important as we faithfully seek to fix deeply embedded character flaws which go ‘not out but by prayer and fasting’ (Matthew 17:21; see also Mark 9:29).”¹²

**LEARNING ACTIVITY:
INCREASING SPIRITUALITY**

Ask participants to consider what they can do to follow the Savior more closely. Possibilities could include scripture study, application of the teachings of Jesus Christ in their lives, daily prayer for help in dealing with anger, repentance, and consistent Church and temple attendance. Challenge them to give careful thought and prayer to this endeavor, seeking help from the bishop or branch president if needed. Suggest that they write down their plan for increasing spirituality and refer to it often to see how they are progressing.

PREVENT RELAPSE

Relapse prevention is the process of disrupting the anger cycle by changing thoughts and behavior and by using other intervention strategies that the person discovers. Intervention strategies provide alternatives to anger build-up. Relapse prevention and intervention strategies may involve help from family, friends, co-workers, bishop, or course instructor. Relapse prevention usually works best during the first two phases of the anger cycle: the pretends-to-be-normal and build-up phases. The person learns to recognize and respond to risk factors (events or emotions that trigger anger) in ways that disrupt the cycle and prevent relapse. The following is an example of how a person may prevent relapse.

Pretends-to-Be-Normal Phase

The person recognizes his or her anger problem but manages it in a healthy way. He or she is aware of anger triggers and uses strategies to cope or escape, such as avoiding high-risk situations, relaxing, and taking time-out. The person actively works to resolve the conflicts and problems leading to anger.¹³

Build-up Phase and Use of Interventions

The person uses new coping strategies to limit anger level and intensity. He or she corrects and replaces negative thoughts with positive statements (“I can handle this” or “I can find other solutions to this problem”). He or she acknowledges the painful feelings underneath the anger and recognizes that these feelings are normal. The person stops addictive behaviors, including fantasizing about acting out the behavior and planning to vent angry feelings. He or she discusses the problems or, if the situation is unchangeable, writes about them. The person releases energy through physical activities and builds self-confidence by doing something he or she enjoys. The person strives for spiritual rebirth.¹⁴

LEARNING ACTIVITY: DEVELOPING A RELAPSE PREVENTION PLAN

A relapse prevention outline is provided on page 45 to help participants develop a plan to prevent the recurrence of anger. Provide copies of the outline for class members. Discuss how the suggestions in this session can be applied to the relapse prevention outline. Suggest that individuals prayerfully seek help from the Lord and from their family, friends, and bishop as they prepare and carry out their plan.

THE PEACE OF GOD

The Apostle Paul wrote of “the peace of God, which passeth all understanding” (Philippians 4:7). Those who have struggled with and successfully overcome anger know how liberating it is to feel peace and freedom from this emotion. As one person described it, “I used to walk around feeling like I wanted to hurt everyone I saw. Anger dominated my life. As I applied gospel principles and as I learned to think differently and to view others in a better way, my anger went away. Now I can enjoy being around others. I have my life back again.”

NOTES

1. In Conference Report, Apr. 1991, 97; or *Ensign*, May 1991, 74.
2. In Conference Report, Apr. 1998, 106; or *Ensign*, May 1998, 80–81.
3. In Conference Report, Oct. 2001, 65; or *Ensign*, Nov. 2001, 52.
4. In Conference Report, Oct. 2001, 103; or *Ensign*, Nov. 2001, 84.
5. See *Men and Anger: Understanding and Managing Your Anger* (Holyoke, Massachusetts: NEARI Press, 2004), 67–70. ISBN# 1-929657-12-9.
6. Adapted from anger log by Cullen and Freeman-Longo, *Men and Anger*, 31–32.
7. *The Feeling Good Handbook*, revised edition (New York: Plume, 1999), 8–9.
8. See Raymond Novaco, *Anger Control: The Development and Evaluation of an Experimental Treatment* (Lexington, Massachusetts: Lexington Books, 1975), 7, 95–96.
9. In Conference Report, Oct. 1973, 24; or *Ensign*, Jan. 1974, 28.
10. In Conference Report, Apr. 1992, 26; or *Ensign*, May 1992, 20.
11. In Conference Report, Oct. 1985, 4; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1985, 5.
12. In Conference Report, Oct. 2001, 34; or *Ensign*, Nov. 2001, 29.
13. See *Men and Anger*, 70–71.
14. See *Men and Anger*, 72–74.

IDENTIFYING MY ANGER CYCLE

Describe the typical situations that trigger your anger (for example, spouse argues with me; bank account is overdrawn; house is in disarray):

Describe the thoughts or justifications that feed your anger (for example, my spouse doesn't care about anyone but herself; my husband is totally irresponsible):

Describe the feelings underlying your anger (for example, disrespected, used, ignored):

Describe the physical cues that indicate you are getting angry (for example, sweaty palms, rapid heart rate, tenseness, irritability):

Describe what you do that feeds your anger (for example, dwelling on the offense, refusing to talk about it, drinking alcohol):

Describe how you act out your anger (including your worst behavior):

Describe your thoughts, feelings, and behaviors after acting out your anger (for example, relief, guilt, sorrow, contrition):

SAMPLE ANGER LOG

Information Requested	Situation A	Situation B
Date and triggering event or person:	10/19 Argument with husband.	10/20 Kids misbehaving.
Intensity of my anger:	Mild 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Severe	Mild 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Severe
Thoughts feeding my anger:	He's a jerk. Doesn't care about me.	Kids never listen. Don't respect me.
Feelings underlying my anger:	Unloved, ignored, unappreciated.	Used, ignored.
How I dealt with my anger:	Screamed at him. Called him a jerk.	Calmly told them to go to their room until they could behave.
Self-talk in dealing with anger:	He deserves to be punished. He hurt me. I'm only paying him back.	They were just being children. They weren't trying to defy me.
Success in controlling my anger:	None 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Great	None 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Great
What seemed to help:	Nothing I did helped. What I did made it worse.	Took a time out. Went for a walk, and then talked with the kids.
Suppressed, vented, or resolved anger:	Suppressed feelings after my outburst.	Talked out my frustrations.
What I'll do better next time:	Not react. Calm down before I talk.	Nothing. I did well this time.

Adapted from Murray Cullen and Robert E. Freeman-Longo, *Men and Anger: Understanding and Managing Your Anger* (Holyoke, Massachusetts: NEARI Press, 2004), 33–34. ISBN# 1-929657-12-9.

ANGER LOG

Information Requested	Situation A	Situation B
Date and triggering event or person:		
Intensity of my anger:	Mild Severe 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	Mild Severe 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Thoughts feeding my anger:		
Feelings underlying my anger:		
How I dealt with my anger:		
Self-talk in dealing with anger:		
Success in controlling my anger:	None Great 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	None Great 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
What seemed to help:		
Suppressed, vented, or resolved anger:		
What I'll do better next time:		

Adapted from Murray Cullen and Robert E. Freeman-Longo, *Men and Anger: Understanding and Managing Your Anger* (Holyoke, Massachusetts: NEARI Press, 2004), 33–34, 117. ISBN# 1-929657-12-9.



“HE THAT HATH THE SPIRIT OF CONTENTION
IS NOT OF ME, BUT IS OF THE DEVIL,
WHO IS THE FATHER OF CONTENTION.”

3 NEPHI 11:29





RESOLVING CONFLICT

SESSION OBJECTIVES

During this session, help participants:

- Understand that differences in marriage are normal and that resolving conflicts can strengthen relationships and build faith, fortitude, and character.
- Know how to apply a three-phase model for resolving conflict.
- Understand rules for discussing problems so that differences can be resolved.

FINDING SOLUTIONS TO DIFFERENCES OF OPINION

Elder Joe J. Christensen of the Seventy observed: “Any intelligent couple will have differences of opinion. Our challenge is to be sure that we know how to resolve them. That is part of the process of making a good marriage better.”¹

Elder Robert E. Wells of the Seventy noted that since husbands and wives have diverse backgrounds and experiences, they are bound to have differences: “But being different doesn’t necessarily mean that one person is right and the other is wrong—or that one way is better than another. . . . Even though there may be differences of opinion, habit, or background, husbands and wives can have ‘their hearts knit together in unity and in love one towards another’ (Mosiah 18:21).”²

Differences between spouses can be beneficial when the couple love one another and learn to work together; their interests and abilities become complementary, and the couple can accomplish much more than either could do alone.

Unfortunately, many couples fail to resolve differences amicably. Deborah Tannen, an educator and author, described Western civilization as an “argument culture” in which citizens are encouraged to view others from an “adversarial frame of mind.”³ The results are cynicism, lawsuits, and courts filled with people seeking resolution for their conflicts.

Left unresolved, differences can escalate into major conflict, as evidenced by national divorce statistics, which show that nearly half of U.S. marriages end in divorce. If marriages full of unresolved conflict do not end in divorce, they often lead to many other problems, including unhappiness, discontent, depression, and separation.

Divorce and conflict have consequences that often affect children throughout their lives. Linda Waite of the University of Chicago and coauthor Maggie Gallagher report: “Children raised in single-parent households are, on average, more likely to be poor, to have health problems and psychological disorders, to commit crimes and exhibit

other conduct disorders, have somewhat poorer relationships with both family and peers, and as adults eventually get fewer years of education and enjoy less stable marriages and lower occupational statuses than children whose parents got and stayed married.”⁴

Successful Resolution of Conflict

Successful resolution of conflict involves avoiding selfishness, finding a common ground, and focusing on similarities rather than differences. Resolution also requires good communication skills, cooperation, and the desire to find mutually acceptable solutions to problems. Resolving conflict, while sometimes painful, is a healthy part of living that can build faith, fortitude, character, and personal righteousness.

Elder Loren C. Dunn of the Seventy declared: “There is a need for us, perhaps more than ever before, to reach within ourselves and allow the quality of mutual respect, mingled with charity and forgiveness, to influence our actions with one another; to be able to disagree without becoming disagreeable; to lower our voices and build on common ground with the realization that once the storm has passed, we will still have to live with one another.”⁵

The gospel teaches us to avoid contention. The Lord commanded, “Be one; and if ye are not one ye are not mine” (D&C 38:27). He taught the Nephites that the devil is the source of contention: “There shall be no disputations among you. . . . He that hath the spirit of contention is not of me, but is of the devil, who is the father of contention, and he stirreth up the hearts of men to contend with anger, one with another” (3 Nephi 11:28–29).

To be unified, couples must resist the impulse to be contentious; they must learn to reconcile conflict in an amicable way. Some conflicts are resolved when one person chooses not to react to a provocation, or when a person apologizes and makes a needed behavioral change. This change often motivates the other person to want to change as well. Many conflicts can be resolved when both spouses focus more on trying to understand each other and less on changing each other.

Scriptural Guidelines

The scriptures provide guidelines for preventing and resolving conflict. King Benjamin cautioned his people to avoid contention: “O my people, beware lest there shall arise contentions among you” (Mosiah 2:32). Alma identified love as a virtue that can prevent contention. He taught that “every man should love his neighbor as himself, that there should be no contention” (Mosiah 23:15). The Lord commanded His followers to “cease to contend one with another” (D&C 136:23) and asked that they “be one” as He and the Father are one (John 17:11).

Conversion to the gospel also brings peace and harmony. Following the Savior’s ministry to the Nephites and Lamanites, “the people were all converted unto the Lord . . . and there were no contentions and disputations among them . . . because of the love of God which did dwell in the hearts of the people. And there were no envyings, nor strifes, nor tumults, . . . and surely there could not be a happier people among all the people who had been created by the hand of God” (4 Nephi 1:2, 15–16).

Husbands and wives who are truly converted—who strive to love one another and promote each other’s well-being—will more readily resolve the differences that come into their lives.

A MODEL FOR RESOLVING CONFLICT

The following conflict-resolution model, adapted from the work of psychologist Susan Heitler, can help couples resolve conflicts in an amicable and productive way.⁶ It will help them identify solutions that satisfy both husband and wife.

This three-phase model has the following characteristics:

- It is based on communication and on sharing perspectives, which is a key to solving problems.
- It is cooperative rather than competitive, evasive, coercive, or antagonistic.
- It addresses all concerns and therefore leads to an outcome that is acceptable to everyone.

Phase One—Express Views

In this phase, husband and wife fully state their views regarding the conflict. For example, John may say, “I want to handle our finances—budget the money, pay the bills, balance the checkbook.” Jan may say, “I want to manage our money. I have the time and the ability.” The husband and wife listen respectfully to each other’s views.

Sometimes when the couple clearly share their perspectives, they discover that their wants do not really conflict. The perceived conflict was merely a result of misunderstanding.

If each spouse’s commitment to his or her preferences is strong enough, and the positions still seem to conflict, the couple may deadlock at this level over seemingly incompatible positions. In the example above, neither John nor Jan may be willing to relinquish control over the money. When a deadlock occurs, the couple moves to the next phase of the conflict-resolution model.

Phase Two—Explore Concerns

The couple explores the concerns that underlie their positions—their feelings, wishes, fears, memories, likes, dislikes, and values. The focus is on understanding and accepting the other person’s concerns and on explaining one’s own concerns clearly.

As they explore their underlying concerns, couples often find that many of their values, thoughts, feelings, and desires are similar and compatible. In the example of John and Jan, John does not want to depend on Jan to handle the finances; he is afraid of losing control over their economic well-being. Jan does not want to give John complete control over their finances because she believes financial management is one of her strengths. Both value independence as well as interdependence. Both were reared in homes where one parent dominated financial matters and the other parent felt left out.

During this phase, opposition gives way to cooperation. Instead of viewing each other as opponents, the couple think of themselves as members of the same team who are exploring the roots of a relationship problem.

When this phase is successful, the husband and wife have broadened the frame of the problem from “what I want” and “what you want” to “what we would like.” They assume that any concern of one is important to the other. While their positions conflict, their underlying concerns can be different and yet compatible. Their empathy generally increases when they come to understand and appreciate each other’s

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fears, hurts, and desires. Sometimes a solution will become obvious when both have verbalized their underlying concerns.

If concerns seem incompatible and resolution is not forthcoming, the couple may need to explore the concerns in greater depth. Good communication skills are important. Criticism, defensiveness, or other argumentative stances halt the process of collaborative problem solving. By contrast, tactfulness, listening to understand each other, affection, laughter, and mutual goodwill facilitate movement toward mutual understanding and solutions from which both spouses benefit. Couples can review session 2 for information on communicating effectively.

Phase Three—Select Mutually Satisfying Solutions

Sometimes an acceptable solution will become obvious as the couple thoroughly explore their underlying concerns together. If a solution is not evident, the couple can brainstorm possibilities, writing down every idea that comes to mind. Then they can look for the solution that best addresses the most important concerns and modify or augment the solution until it has components to meet the concerns of each person.

Each person focuses on what he or she can do to address the most important concerns rather than trying to determine what the other person can do. Susan Heitler calls this process of developing a solution “building a *solution set* rather than simply . . . finding *a* or *the* solution.”⁷

Once they have reached a solution, the couple will benefit from asking themselves whether any aspect of the problem still feels unresolved.⁸ If they feel unsettled about the solution or if they are unable to come up with an acceptable solution, the couple can repeat phase two, taking more time to explore the underlying concerns. Then as they repeat phase three, they will likely find an acceptable solution.

Finding a solution can be surprisingly easy if the couple have thoroughly and cooperatively explored their underlying concerns. Even when options are limited, the couple can arrive at a solution that seems best or fair to both.

In the example of John and Jan, they both agreed to budget their income together and divide responsibility for paying bills. They decided to consult each other before spending money on nonbudgeted items. They agreed to evaluate their plan at the end of the month.

Conflict resolution often does not occur in orderly sequence from phase one to phase three. A couple may need to move their discussion back and forth between all three stages.

RULES FOR DISCUSSING PROBLEMS

Rules for discussing problems have been provided on page 53 to help couples successfully use the conflict resolution model. Participants have a copy of the rules in their books, but you may want to make copies for easy reference as class participants learn these skills or for those who may have forgotten their books.

Review and discuss the rules as a class before you have couples practice the conflict-resolution model. If class members have questions about any of these rules, you can review the principles taught in session 2, as necessary.

LEARNING ACTIVITY: APPLYING THE CONFLICT RESOLUTION MODEL

Invite a couple to role-play using the conflict-resolution model. Coach them through the process, pointing out each phase of the model as you help them through it. Invite the couple to use the scenario below, create one of your own, or have them select a conflict of minor importance in their marriage. Couples will address major issues more easily after they learn to use the model to resolve minor conflicts.

SCENARIO

A husband owns a business that has been only marginally successful in 10 years. His wife teaches school to supplement their income. She wants him to sell the business and find employment elsewhere. She would like to quit her job and stay home with their five children, ages 3 to 12. He wants her to be patient, believing the business will soon do better. He has spent much time and effort on the business and does not want it to fail.

PHASE ONE

Have the couple identify and express their differing positions. Remind them to state their positions clearly and to listen to their spouse's position without interrupting. If they begin to argue, stop the discussion and teach them to use more effectively the communication skills from session 2 and the rules for discussing problems. When they have shared their positions, ask them to make sure their views have been clearly stated. A person might say: "I've shared my most important wants and feelings. Is this true for you?"

To make the transition from the first phase of conflict resolution to the second phase, have them summarize the wants they have shared. Ask them to include in their summary the word **and** (instead of **yes, but . . .**) to convey acceptance of conflicting wants, and **we** (instead of **I**), to convey a sense of unity in resolving the conflict. The following outline may help in this process.

I want . . . (summarize your position).

And you want . . . (summarize your spouse's position).

We need to . . . (summarize the conflict that needs to be resolved).

PHASE TWO

Have the couple share underlying concerns, using the guidelines provided above. Give the couple time to explore their concerns. Make sure each has a chance to express his or her feelings without interruption or criticism. If needed, ask questions to help them fully disclose their concerns. As they discuss, write their concerns on the board. Then have them identify concerns that are complementary.

PHASE THREE

To begin this phase, you might suggest that the wife or husband ask, "What can we do to solve this problem?" Answers may be readily forthcoming if the couple have thoroughly explored underlying concerns. Encourage them to look for solutions that respond to the needs and concerns of both wife and husband.

Do not allow either partner to criticize ideas that are shared during the brainstorming process. Criticism will impede creativity and inhibit sharing, thereby disrupting the process of identifying potential solutions.

Once potential solutions have been generated, ask the couple to evaluate them and look for a solution that best meets the wants and needs of both partners. If either partner feels unsettled about the solution or if the couple is unable to come up with a solution, help them explore underlying concerns (phase two) in greater depth.

HARMONIOUS RELATIONSHIPS

Individuals can find beauty in marriage as they strive to abide by gospel principles, as they work diligently to resolve disagreements and conflict, and as they strive to promote each other's happiness and well-being.

President Gordon B. Hinckley taught:

"There is no other arrangement that meets the divine purposes of the Almighty. Man and woman are His creations. Their duality is His design. Their complementary relationships and functions are fundamental to His purposes. One is incomplete without the other. . . .

"The cure for most marital troubles does not lie in divorce. It lies in repentance and forgiveness, in expressions of kindness and concern. It is to be found in application of the Golden Rule."⁹

President Hinckley also explained:

"Marriage is beautiful when beauty is looked for and cultivated. . . . I can show you throughout this church hundreds of thousands of families who make it work with love and peace, discipline and honesty, concern and unselfishness.

"There must be recognition on the part of both husband and wife of the solemnity and sanctity of marriage and of the God-given design behind it.

"There must be a willingness to overlook small faults, to forgive, and then to forget.

"There must be a holding of one's tongue. Temper is a vicious and corrosive thing that destroys affection and casts out love. . . .

"There must be the Spirit of God, invited and worked for, nurtured and strengthened. There must be recognition of the fact that each is a child of God—father, mother, son, and daughter, each with a divine birthright—and also recognition of the fact that when we offend one of these, we offend our Father in Heaven."¹⁰

NOTES

1. In Conference Report, Apr. 1995, 86; or *Ensign*, May 1995, 65.
2. "Overcoming Those Differences of Opinion," *Ensign*, Jan. 1987, 60.
3. *The Argument Culture: Moving from Debate to Dialogue* (New York: Random House, 1998), 3.
4. *The Case for Marriage* (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 125.
5. In Conference Report, Apr. 1991, 109; or *Ensign*, May 1991, 82.
6. See *From Conflict to Resolution: Skills and Strategies for Individual, Couple, and Family Therapy* by Susan M. Heitler, Ph.D. Copyright © 1990 by Susan Heitler. Used by permission of W. W. Norton & Company, Inc. Pages 22–43.
7. *The Power of Two: Secrets to a Strong and Loving Marriage* (California: New Harbinger Publications, 1997), 202.
8. See Susan Heitler, *The Power of Two*, 203; *From Conflict to Resolution*, 41–42.
9. In Conference Report, Oct. 2004, 87–88; or *Ensign*, Nov. 2004, 84.
10. In Conference Report, Apr. 1991, 97; or *Ensign*, May 1991, 74.

RULES FOR DISCUSSING PROBLEMS

Decide on a time and place to talk. Don't begin until you both feel ready.

Stay on topic. If needed, write down your points of view (phase one of the model) and keep them in front of you. It's easy to get sidetracked.

Seek to understand instead of argue. Both of you will lose if you seek to win an argument.

Let your spouse talk. Both of you should have an equal chance to talk without interruption.

Speak softly. You and your spouse can more easily share thoughts and feelings in a stable, noncombative, calm environment. When voices are quiet, you are more likely to hear and feel the promptings of the Holy Ghost.

Take a break, if necessary. If tempers flare, take a time-out, agreeing on a time to resume the discussion once tempers have cooled.

Be kind. Do not attack your spouse's weaknesses or sensitive "hot spots."

Use appropriate language. Profanity and name-calling are offensive, demeaning, and abusive. They impede the conflict-resolution process.

Discuss current issues. Don't dredge up the past. Past issues should only be discussed if they are part of an ongoing unresolved problem.

Do not use violence. Violent behavior is destructive and contrary to gospel principles.

Do not threaten divorce or separation. Such threats have provoked individuals into taking actions they later regret.

Seek spiritual help. As you earnestly pray for assistance, the Lord will direct your efforts, soften hearts, and help you find solutions.

Rest and try again. If you cannot solve a problem by using the model, agree to set the problem aside temporarily. Schedule a time to resume working on it with renewed energy.

Find measurable solutions. For example, a solution such as "I'll initiate family prayer and you'll initiate scripture study" is both measurable and observable.

Plan the implementation of the solution. Decide who will do what, when it will be done, and how often it will be done.

Agree on reminders. Agree on whether reminders are needed, who will give them, and how they will be given.

Plan for exceptions. Plan ahead how you will deal with circumstances that interfere with the solution.

Reevaluate and revise. Set a day and time to reevaluate your solution, making revisions if needed.



“IN THE ENRICHING OF MARRIAGE THE BIG THINGS ARE THE LITTLE THINGS. . . MARRIAGE IS A JOINT QUEST FOR THE GOOD, THE BEAUTIFUL, AND THE DIVINE.”

PRESIDENT JAMES E. FAUST





ENRICHING MARRIAGE

SESSION OBJECTIVES

During this session, help participants:

- Understand that inattention and lack of constant enrichment contribute to the failure of marriages.
- Learn key principles and activities that will enrich marriage.
- Develop a plan to enrich their marriages.

TO LOVE AND CARE FOR EACH OTHER

The First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve Apostles affirmed the central importance of marriage and family life in Heavenly Father's plan for His children. They declared: "Husband and wife have a solemn responsibility to love and care for each other."¹ President Boyd K. Packer of the Quorum of Twelve taught: "No relationship has more potential to exalt a man and a woman than the marriage covenant. No obligation in society or in the Church supersedes it in importance."²

Husbands and wives cannot afford to neglect their marriage relationship. Unfortunately, many do. As a member of the Seventy, President James E. Faust of the First Presidency discussed the causes of divorce, focusing on one in particular:

"Among them are . . . selfishness, immaturity, lack of commitment, inadequate communication, unfaithfulness; and all of the rest, which are obvious and well known.

"In my experience there is another reason which seems not so obvious but which precedes and laces through all of the others. It is the lack of a constant enrichment in marriage. It is an absence of that something extra which makes it precious, special, and wonderful, when it is also drudgery, difficult, and dull."³

During courtship, couples often spend much time together. They focus on their relationship and seek to fulfill each other's needs. They often express affection by showing kindness and respect, being generous, sharing goals and values, spending time together, giving compliments, talking and listening, giving gifts, remembering special occasions, and sending love notes, letters, and cards.

After couples marry, however, education, careers, children, and service begin to fill their lives. They have many demands on their time, including work, family, personal activities, and church and community service. As their responsibilities increase, some couples interact with each other less and less frequently. Time passes and husbands and wives get too involved in other activities; marriage ceases to be as important as

it once was, and relationships suffer. Acts of kindness decrease or stop altogether, communication becomes infrequent and mundane, and expressions of affection and love diminish. Couples become careless in their conversations and behavior. Romance fades, and the marriage relationship begins to wither.

Elder Marlin K. Jensen of the Seventy warned that the devil plays a role in shifting priorities away from marriage: “Enticing voices will speak to us of worldly achievements and acquisitions that may lead us on dangerous detours from which we can return only with great effort. Small, seemingly insignificant choices along the way will have large consequences that will determine our eventual destiny.”⁴ Too often, men and women trade promises of peace, happiness, and eternal life for a chance at fleeting prestige, power, and pride. Small choices accumulate until some people awake to discover they have lost that which they valued most.

MAKING A DIFFERENCE

President Spencer W. Kimball described this problem: “Many people . . . have permitted their marriage to grow stale and weak and cheap. . . . These people will do well to reevaluate, to renew their courting, to express their affection, to acknowledge kindnesses, and to increase their consideration so their marriage can again become beautiful, sweet, and growing.”⁵ To counter this cheapening of marriage, he counseled that couples work on developing their love: “Love . . . cannot be expected to last forever unless it is continually fed with portions of love, the manifestation of esteem and admiration, the expressions of gratitude, and the consideration of unselfishness.”⁶

The First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve Apostles have proclaimed that “the family is central to the Creator’s plan for the eternal destiny of His children.”⁷ The scriptures affirm, “A man [shall] leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife” (Moses 3:24). Since the family is central to the Creator’s plan, those who wish to obey Him make their marriages and families central to their own lives. While many other activities in life are worthwhile, they should not become so important that they prevent a couple from investing the necessary time and energy to enrich their relationship. When husband and wife make each other and their marriage a top priority, they experience happiness and peace and ultimately enjoy an eternal marriage relationship.

The gospel of Jesus Christ helps people make their marriages a high priority. In terms of priorities, marriage is second only to love of God. Sister Marjorie P. Hinckley recalled the priorities of the man she married: “As we got closer to marriage, I felt completely confident that Gordon loved me. But I also knew somehow that I would never come first with him. I knew I was going to be second in his life and that the Lord was going to be first. And that was okay.”⁸

When a husband and wife love God and keep His commandments, they also love and cherish each other and treat each other with respect. They keep the covenants they have made. Loving and serving God is their first priority; loving and serving their spouse is a close second or even a part of carrying out the first priority. Also, when they love God, their capacity to love one another increases, and their commitment to be faithful to the marriage becomes resolute.

Just as small decisions can lead individuals away from their marriages, small and seemingly insignificant acts of kindness, charity, and love can heal emotional wounds and establish a firm foundation for healthy and fulfilling relationships.

President Faust counseled: “In the enriching of marriage the big things are the little things. It is a constant appreciation for each other and a thoughtful demonstration of gratitude. It is the encouraging and the helping of each other to grow. Marriage is a joint quest for the good, the beautiful, and the divine.”⁹

Husband and wife will enrich their marriage as they center their relationship in the gospel, take time for each other, have fun together, talk frequently and positively, and perform acts of kindness.

LEARNING ACTIVITY: ENHANCING YOUR MARRIAGE

Ask class members to consider the benefits of investing more energy in their marriage. Have them write the benefits as the class discusses them. (Possible benefits may include greater happiness; a sense of purpose and fulfillment; improved physical, emotional, and spiritual health; increased love; greater intimacy; better communication; and peace of mind.)

Ask each couple to list some of the little things they can do to improve their marriage, such as regularly showing interest, appreciation, and gratitude; offering encouragement; and helping each other through difficulties and challenges. Ask class members to consult with their spouse when identifying things to do and to be specific.

Invite class members to commit themselves to begin doing the things they identified. Suggest that they surprise their spouse with loving communications and deeds—giving approval, appreciation, and affection with an awareness of their spouse’s needs.

Center Your Marriage in the Gospel of Jesus Christ

President Faust observed, “There is one special enriching ingredient, which above all else will help join a man and a woman together in a very real, sacred, spiritual sense. It is the presence of the divine in marriage.”¹⁰

President Spencer W. Kimball taught that couples will have great happiness when they love the Lord and each other more than themselves and when they attend the temple frequently, pray together, attend their Church meetings, keep their lives wholly chaste, and work together to build up the kingdom of God.¹¹

When wife and husband center their relationship in the gospel of Jesus Christ, their marriage and their personal lives improve. Couples should pray together morning and night, study the scriptures, and have a weekly family home evening.

The gospel teaches individuals to love and serve one another and to “bear one another’s burdens” (Mosiah 18:8). When individuals take upon themselves the name of Christ, they covenant to love others in this manner. Christlike attitudes and actions nourish and strengthen marriage relationships as couples keep their covenants.

President Faust identified one of the greatest sources of happiness as “having the companionship and enjoying the fruits of a Holy and Divine Presence. . . . Spiritual oneness is the anchor.” He observed: “Divorces are increasing because in many cases the union lacks that enrichment which comes from the sanctifying benediction which flows from the keeping of the commandments of God. It is a lack of spiritual nourishment.”¹²

LEARNING ACTIVITY:
SEEKING SPIRITUAL ONENESS

Ask class members to discuss their feelings about seeking greater spiritual oneness in marriage. How important is it to them? What differences could it make in their relationship? What would they need to do differently to achieve spiritual oneness? Ask them to write down some goals they would like to work on as a couple to increase spirituality and oneness. They should also write who will be responsible for initiating activities to achieve the goals.

Take Time for Each Other

Husbands and wives must persistently seek ways to nurture their relationship. Quite often, the activities that siphon away time and energy are good. Completing an education, succeeding in a career, raising children, fulfilling Church callings, and honoring civic and military obligations all compete with marriage and family time.

Speaking to Church leaders, President Gordon B. Hinckley warned: "It is imperative that you not neglect your families. Nothing you have is more precious. . . . When all is said and done, it is this family relationship which we will take with us into the life beyond."¹³

Sometimes individuals have to make tough decisions. When happiness and stability in marriage are at stake, they may need to sacrifice lucrative, time-consuming jobs and delay financial and personal goals. They may even need to reduce the amount of time spent serving others to allow time for this most sacred relationship.

President Hinckley counseled: "Together with [your family], determine how much time you will spend with them and when. And then stick to it. Try not to let anything interfere. Consider it sacred. Consider it binding. Consider it an earned time of enjoyment.

"Keep Monday night sacred for family home evening. Have an evening alone with your wife. Arrange some vacation time with the entire family."¹⁴

LEARNING ACTIVITY:
PRIORITIZING AND PLANNING
FOR A BETTER MARRIAGE

Husbands and wives may find it helpful to see whether their priorities are similar. List the following seven items on a chalkboard or a whiteboard. Ask class members to rank these seven priorities from highest to lowest. Then ask them to rank them according to what they think their spouse's priorities are.

- Achieving employment goals
- Magnifying a Church calling
- Providing community service
- Developing an increase of love for and faith in Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ
- Achieving success in marriage
- Having a good relationship with your children
- Developing talents

Ask participants to compare their lists with their spouse's, discussing areas of agreement and disagreement. Ask whether any differences are great enough to reflect problems in the relationship.

Invite participants to make a plan for giving additional time and attention to their marriage. Help them explore ideas such as including "schedule time together" as an agenda item in a weekly family council meeting, cutting back on less important activities, taking a few moments to talk at the end of the workday, and scheduling outings together, even if it is only a walk around the park or neighborhood.

Have Fun Together

Church leaders have taught that recreation strengthens family life. The First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve included "wholesome recreational activities" as one of the principles for successful marriages and families.¹⁵

Psychologists Howard Markman, Scott Stanley, and Susan Blumberg observed that couples in troubled relationships do not just suddenly find each other unattractive. Rather, "the biggest reason attraction dies down is that couples neglect the very things that built and maintained it in the first place, friendship and fun."¹⁶ They recommended that couples set aside time for fun and not try to solve problems during that time.¹⁷

Writer Susan Page noted that "social scientists who have studied leisure time corroborate the conclusion I reached in my interviews [with couples who thrive]: husbands and wives who spend leisure time together tend to be much more satisfied with their marriages than those who don't."¹⁸

Page said the couples she interviewed do many things together: "They dance; run or work out; hike; ski; play volleyball; . . . eat out; go to movies, theater, or concerts; entertain friends; play parlor games, and so on." She added that "watching TV did not count for most of these couples as playtime, unless they were watching a special program together."¹⁹

Markman, Stanley, and Blumberg mentioned activities such as exercising, swimming, hiking, doing yoga, playing tag, cooking, collecting sea shells, watching movies, having a soda, and talking (sharing goals, dreams, plans, hopes, compliments).²⁰ The activities themselves are not as important as the attitudes of the couples doing them. Working together on household tasks can be enjoyable. Often, the most enjoyable activities cost the least.

As couples consider activities they can do together, remind them that they should not consider only the activities they both enjoy. If spouses take turns selecting activities and sharing interests, they can gain a better understanding of each other, and they will perhaps develop new interests. Their willingness to try new activities and support each other will enrich their marriage. Husbands and wives do not need to give up the good things they do; they can begin to share many of those activities and participate in them together.

President Ezra Taft Benson pointed out that family home evenings are a good time for family fun: "Family home evenings should be scheduled once a week as a time for recreation, work projects, skits, songs around the piano, games, special refreshments, and family prayers. Like iron links in a chain, this practice will bind a family together, in love, pride, tradition, strength, and loyalty."²¹

**LEARNING ACTIVITY:
PLANNING ACTIVITIES TO DO TOGETHER**

Ask couples to brainstorm wholesome activities they could enjoy together. Have them write everything that comes to mind, making their lists as long as possible. From their lists, have them choose one or two activities they will do each week for the next month. You could also invite them to plan how they will celebrate major events in their marriage such as a second honeymoon or their 10th, 20th, 25th, or 30th wedding anniversaries.

Talk Frequently and Positively

Elder Russell M. Nelson of the Quorum of the Twelve emphasized the importance of frequent communication: "Some couples seem not to listen to one another. Taking time to talk is essential to keep lines of communication intact. If marriage is a prime relationship in life, it deserves prime time! Yet less important appointments are often given priority, leaving only leftover moments for listening to precious partners."²²

President Faust declared: "Marriage relationships can be enriched by better communication. . . . We communicate in a thousand ways, such as a smile, a brush of the hair, a gentle touch, and remembering each day to say 'I love you' and the husband to say 'You're beautiful.' Some other important words to say, when appropriate, are 'I'm sorry.' Listening is excellent communication."²³

Session 2 referred to the study by John Gottman, who found that successful couples interact positively by showing interest in each other, being affectionate, performing thoughtful acts, being appreciative, showing concern and empathy, accepting a spouse's differing point of view, being playful, and sharing joy when having a good time.²⁴

In her research on successful, happy marriages, Susan Page also found effective communication to be essential. Couples whose marriages thrived "had relatively few communication impasses; they were able to talk easily about difficult subjects; they felt they understood each other; they withheld very little from each other; and they could rely on their ability to resolve conflicts." Page found that some couples had never been taught communication rules but seemed to follow them intuitively. Others learned skills from books, articles, workshops, talks, or counselors.²⁵

**LEARNING ACTIVITY:
IMPROVING COMMUNICATION**

Ask each couple to review the characteristics of good communication. Have them identify what they do well as they interact with each other, and how they may have improved since they completed session 2. Then give them the following assignment.

They should engage in daily dialogue (5 minutes each workday and 15 minutes at least twice a week) for the next two weeks regarding their feelings about each other and their life together. Ask them to discuss (1) what was satisfying about their relationship that day and (2) what they most enjoyed about their relationship that day. This time is not for negative comments or to discuss concerns or resolve problems. Couples should include at least one compliment each day that focuses on their spouse's strengths.

This activity will help them see the strengths of their relationship and share with each other their good feelings. It can strengthen their marriage, but only if they are sincere as they do it.

Perform Acts of Kindness

President Gordon B. Hinckley stressed the importance of the kindness that wives and husbands can show each other: "If every husband and every wife would constantly do whatever might be possible to ensure the comfort and happiness of his or her companion, there would be very little, if any, divorce. Argument would never be heard. Accusations would never be leveled. Angry explosions would not occur. Rather, love and concern would replace abuse and meanness."

President Hinckley encouraged men in the Church to help the women in their lives express and develop their talents and other strengths: "The women in our lives are . . . endowed with particular qualities, divine qualities, which cause them to reach out in kindness and with love to those about them. We can encourage that outreach if we will give them opportunity to give expression to the talents and impulses that lie within them. In our old age my beloved companion said to me quietly one evening, 'You have always given me wings to fly, and I have loved you for it.'"²⁶

The courtship that occurs before marriage is even more essential afterward. Husbands and wives help each other address life's challenges when they show genuine respect, kindness, and affection for each other. Relationships suffer tremendously when these elements are missing. Continued acts of kindness and expressions of love create strong, enduring bonds between husbands and wives.

LEARNING ACTIVITY: MAKING AN "ACTS OF KINDNESS" LIST

As a way of helping participants show greater interest and affection, ask them to make a list of 10 or more things they would like their spouse to do more often. The requests should be specific ("Ask me how my day went") rather than general requests ("Be more interested in me"), which are hard to measure. They should not be related to core issues in a major relationship conflict. Also, the requests should be simple and inexpensive. Suggest that spouses consider asking for acts of kindness, such as compliments, love notes, telephone calls, and so forth.

Other possible requests include doing the laundry or some other household task, holding hands or cuddling on the couch, showing gratitude or appreciation, calling each other on the telephone, watching the children, listening, visiting friends or family together, changing the baby's diapers, or doing the shopping.

During the next week, class members should do at least three of the things on their spouse's wish list each day, even if their spouse forgets to do likewise. They should not get annoyed or frustrated if their spouse fails to do items requested of them.

Ask class members to note how it feels when their spouse does things from their wish list. Advise them to recognize and thank their spouse for those acts of kindness. Also, they should note how it feels to do things for their spouse.

Although this is a planned exercise, it can help enhance the marriage relationships of class members, particularly as they do the activities as a genuine expression of love, appreciation, and devotion.

Ask class members to schedule a time in one month, six months, and a year when they will follow up on how they are doing as a couple at integrating the information provided in this session.

HAPPINESS IN MARRIAGE

Marriage relationships will thrive when husband and wife show love and appreciation to each other. Acts of tenderness, consideration, and compassion are essential nutrients. When individuals receive these nutrients, they feel alive and motivated to reach their highest potential. A husband and wife should not expect that everything will always go well. But if they love and respect each other, they will find great satisfaction in marriage. As President Faust noted, “Happiness in marriage and parenthood can exceed a thousand times any other happiness.”²⁷

Couples will find great happiness as they live the gospel, adhere to the inspired teachings of Church leaders, and apply sound relationship principles and skills. There will be challenges. However, couples can find hope in President Spencer W. Kimball’s declaration: “Where there are challenges, you fail only if you fail to keep trying!”²⁸ Persistence will bring the promised reward of greater happiness in this life and eternal family life in the world to come.

NOTES

1. “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 102.
2. In Conference Report, Apr. 1981, 17; or *Ensign*, May 1981, 15.
3. In Conference Report, Oct. 1977, 13; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1977, 10.
4. “A Union of Love and Understanding,” *Ensign*, Oct. 1994, 50.
5. *Marriage and Divorce* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), 22.
6. *Marriage and Divorce*, 23.
7. “The Family: A Proclamation,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 102.
8. Quoted in Sheri L. Dew, *Go Forward with Faith: The Biography of Gordon B. Hinckley* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1996), 114.
9. In Conference Report, Oct. 1977, 14.
10. In Conference Report, Oct. 1977, 14.
11. See *Marriage and Divorce*, 24.
12. In Conference Report, Oct. 1977, 14.
13. “Rejoicing in the Privilege to Serve,” *Worldwide Leadership Training Meeting*, June 2003, 22.
14. *Worldwide Leadership Training Meeting*, June 2003, 22–23.
15. “The Family: A Proclamation,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 102.
16. *Fighting for Your Marriage* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, Inc., 1994), 262–63.
17. *Fighting for Your Marriage*, 254–56.
18. *The 8 Essential Traits of Couples Who Thrive* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1997), 56.
19. *The 8 Essential Traits*, 54.
20. *Fighting for Your Marriage*, 257–61.
21. In Conference Report, Oct. 1982, 86; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1982, 60.
22. In Conference Report, Apr. 1991, 28; or *Ensign*, May 1991, 23.
23. In Conference Report, Oct. 1977, 13.
24. From *Why Marriages Succeed or Fail* by John Gottman, Ph.D. Copyright © 1994 by John Gottman. Reprinted by permission of Simon & Schuster, Inc. NY. Pages 59–61.
25. *The 8 Essential Traits*, 133.
26. In Conference Report, Oct. 2004, 87–88; or *Ensign*, Nov. 2004, 84–85.
27. In Conference Report, Oct. 1977, 14.
28. In Conference Report, Oct. 1980, 5; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1980, 5.

APPENDIX

STRENGTHENING MARRIAGE

A COURSE FOR ENHANCING RELATIONSHIPS

Prepared by LDS Family Services

HOW CAN I BENEFIT FROM THIS COURSE?

This course offers practical help for couples from a gospel perspective. It is designed to help you:

- Understand how eternal principles and covenants can affect marriage.
- Communicate effectively with your spouse and children.
- Promote marital unity, equality, and sharing.
- Overcome anger problems.
- Learn skills to resolve conflicts.
- Enrich your marriage and make it a priority.

WHO CAN ATTEND?

The course is particularly beneficial for couples having problems and challenges in their marriages, but the principles taught in it can enhance any marriage. It is highly recommended that you and your spouse attend together.

HOW LONG DOES THE COURSE LAST?

The length of the course varies according to the needs of the participants. Generally, six to eight sessions are planned, with one session per week. Each session is approximately 90 minutes long.

WHAT WILL BE EXPECTED OF ME IF I PARTICIPATE?

You should attend every meeting. You will receive and be asked to study *Strengthening Marriage: Resource Guide for Couples*. The guide contains course information and activities to help you strengthen your marriage. You will also be asked to complete a questionnaire at the end of the course to help evaluate its success. You will not be required to sign the questionnaire. All information is strictly confidential.

WHAT WILL THE PROGRAM COST?

A fee of _____ will be charged to cover expenses.

WHEN AND WHERE IS THE COURSE BEING TAUGHT?

The next Strengthening Marriage course is scheduled for _____,
beginning at _____ at _____.

HOW CAN I SIGN UP FOR THE COURSE OR OBTAIN MORE INFORMATION?

Call _____
or _____ at LDS Family Services, _____.

WHO WILL TEACH THE COURSE?

A representative of LDS Family Services or a ward or stake volunteer.

PREPARATION LIST

Small details can contribute to a successful course. Use the checklist below to remind yourself of such details.

The following items have been reserved:

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> microphone or sound system | <input type="checkbox"/> chalk |
| <input type="checkbox"/> videos or DVDs | <input type="checkbox"/> easel/writing pads |
| <input type="checkbox"/> podium | <input type="checkbox"/> markers |
| <input type="checkbox"/> overhead projector | <input type="checkbox"/> blank paper |
| <input type="checkbox"/> TV and VCR or DVD player | <input type="checkbox"/> pencils |
| <input type="checkbox"/> chalkboard | <input type="checkbox"/> other: _____ |

- All necessary materials for participants have been copied and collated.
- The room has been reserved.
- The room has been set up for the expected number of participants.
- Extra chairs are available.
- Bathrooms are clean and easy to find. (If not, signs with arrows have been displayed.)
- The room air conditioner or heater has been turned on in advance so the room is comfortable.

PROGRAM EVALUATION FORM

Thank you for participating in our marriage workshop. You have invested your time in learning information and skills to improve your marriage. We would like to know if the workshop has helped you achieve that goal. Please complete this evaluation form. Do not write your name. We want you to be able to answer questions openly, without any concern about disclosing your identity. With your help, we can improve future marriage workshops.

Please circle the answer in each column that best describes how well you are doing now as compared to how you were doing before taking the course.

	How I'm doing now:			Compared to before the course, I am now:		
	Poor	Okay	Good	Worse	Same	Better
A. Confidence that our marriage will be eternal.	Poor	Okay	Good	Worse	Same	Better
B. Ability to communicate better with my spouse.	Poor	Okay	Good	Worse	Same	Better
C. Equality and shared decision making in our marriage.	Poor	Okay	Good	Worse	Same	Better
D. Ability to control and resolve angry feelings.	Poor	Okay	Good	Worse	Same	Better
E. Ability to resolve conflicts in a mutually satisfying way.	Poor	Okay	Good	Worse	Same	Better
F. Priority given to our relationship.	Poor	Okay	Good	Worse	Same	Better

In what areas has this marriage course helped you the most?

In what areas do you still need help to improve?

How can this course be improved?

What did you like or not like about the instructor's teaching style?

How many course lessons did you read? _____

On a scale of 1 to 5, please rate the overall value of the lessons in helping you.

Not Valuable Very Valuable

1 2 3 4 5

Did you do the learning activities in each lesson? ___Yes ___No

On a scale of 1 to 5, rate the overall value of the learning activities in helping you.

Not Valuable Very Valuable

1 2 3 4 5



STRENGTHENING MARRIAGE

This certifies that

has completed the

Strengthening Marriage

Course of

LDS Family Services

AGENCY DIRECTOR

INSTRUCTOR

DATE

1 DS *Family* SERVICES

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