

Keeping the Joy in Relationships – Facilitators Manual

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Couple Meetings

OBJECTIVE: To help couples understand the value of investing 20-30 minutes a week doing a regularly scheduled couple meeting, without children, to create connection, appreciation, and focusing on solutions. Weekly family meetings are different and equally important.

MATERIALS:

- *3 R's and an H for Solutions* posted on a flipchart:
 - Related
 - Reasonable
 - Respectful
 - Helpful
- Blank flipchart for brainstorming Solutions, and another for listing Excuses for not doing weekly Couple Meetings.
- *Couples Meetings: Tips and Cautions for Success*

TIME: 45 minutes

COMMENT: Regular couple meetings could be the most important "little" thing you can do (only 20-30 minutes a week) to keep your relationship vibrant, prevent little problems from getting bigger, share values, focus on solutions to big challenges, and communicate at deep levels that help you feel heard, loved, and appreciated.

DIRECTIONS:

Demonstration (20 minutes):

1. Share the above comment.
2. Invite the group to turn to the *Couple Meetings: Tips and Cautions for Success in the Playbook*. Ask participants to take turns reading each one.
3. Ask for a volunteer couple (not necessarily married) to do a demo in front of the group. The group can turn to the Couple Meetings format to follow along.
4. Ask the couple to choose a challenge from the List of Challenges, or another challenge they would like help with.

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5. Invite the couple to start their meeting with a compliment or appreciation for each other.
6. Next, have them brainstorm for solutions to the topic they decided to discuss—**including some wild and crazy ideas and even some *that they know are not respectful***. Be sure they include at least 6 possible solutions. Ask for a volunteer to write their brainstormed ideas on a flipchart.
7. When they are finished brainstorming, display the flipchart of Related, Respectful, Reasonable, and Helpful and ask the scribe to cross off any they think do not meet these 4 criteria.
8. Ask them to choose one or more solutions they can both agree to.
9. Ask for a commitment that they will try it for a week. If it doesn't work, they can put it back on the agenda and try again.
10. Ask them to decide on a regular weekly time for their couple meeting, and a place for their agenda (where they can add items during the week).

Pair Practice (20 minutes - 10 min each):

11. Have everyone get into pairs and have them practice the Couple Meeting Format. They can turn to the ***Couple Meetings* pages in the Playbook** to follow the Format.
12. Walk around to see how people are doing.
13. Invite sharing about what they have learned from this activity. (Allow about 5 minutes.)

Optional Extension:

1. Invite brainstorming for excuses for not doing weekly couple meetings, and have the scribe write them on a flipchart.
2. Then ask if any of these excuses are more important than taking 20 minutes a week that could greatly improve their relationship.

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COUPLE MEETINGS: TIPS AND CAUTIONS FOR SUCCESS

TIPS

1. Remember the long-term purpose of couple meetings: To create connection and closeness by focusing on appreciations and solutions.
2. Post an agenda (where the children can't see it) where both can write their concerns or topics for discussion.
3. Start with compliments to set the tone by verbalizing positive things about each other.
4. Choose the first topic on your agenda and focus on solutions, not blame.
5. Brainstorming means thinking of all the possible solutions to solve this challenge. Have fun. Some suggestions can be silly or outrageous.
6. Use the 3 R's and an H to eliminate some suggestions and then choose one or more suggestion (by consensus) that is practical and respectful to both and try it for a week.
7. When consensus can't be reached, table that item for more discussion next week.

CAUTIONS

1. AVOID using couple meetings as a platform for blaming, shaming, or complaining. Focus on solutions.
2. DON'T expect perfection. Celebrate improvement.
3. DON'T mix Family Meetings with Couple Meetings. They should be done separately.
4. AVOID SKIPPING REGULAR, WEEKLY Couple Meetings. **Make them as important as family meetings on your calendar.**