A Model For Marriage Enrichment


Objectives
These marriage enrichment workshops will enable the participants to:

• Reminisce about what initially attracted them to their spouses.
• List and describe several qualities of the healthy, growing marriage.
• Describe what can block a marriage from growing.
• Express what they especially appreciate about their spouses.
• Tell why both togetherness and separateness are essential for the growing marriage.
• Identify commonalities and differences couples see in their relationship.
• Reminisce about significant crises or difficulties couples have experienced and how these situations helped or hindered their relationship.
• Describe several important principles for handling conflicts effectively.
• Make plans for strengthening their marital relationships.
Session 1: The Growing Marriage

1. **Get Acquainted (15-20 minutes)**
   In small groups of four or six, have spouses describe how they met each other, and what it was that initially attracted them to each other. (Option: If you have a small group, do this sharing in one larger group.)

2. **Input (15-20 minutes)**
   Be prepared to share the following with couples:
   - Introduce the series. Provide a brief overview of the objectives and activities for this workshop series. Share your enthusiasm and hope that this will be a meaningful and growing experience for each couple.
   - Make a brief presentation of the qualities of the growing marriage. Distribute copies of “Qualities of the Healthy Marriage and Family.”
   - Briefly relate how each of these qualities is essential for the growing marriage:
     - Appreciation
     - Time
     - Communication
     - Faith
     - Crisis Management
   - If possible, relate a few significant personal experiences about these qualities.

3. **Small Group Discussion (15-20 minutes)**
   Divide into groups of three, being sure that spouses are not in the same groups. Ask groups to brainstorm what can block a marriage from growing and what helps it to grow. Be sure they have sheets of paper and pencils for making lists.

4. **Large Group Sharing (5-10 minutes)**
   Get back into the large group. Take a few minutes for each of the groups to share their lists. Develop a composite list on chalkboard or newsprint.

5. **Affirmation Bombardment (10-15 minutes)**
   - Ask that spouses sit together. Be sure that there is adequate space for each couple to talk privately.
   - Ask each couple to determine who will be Person A and who will be Person B.
   - Then ask that Person A share with Person B what he or she especially appreciates about the other person.
   - Person B then feeds back what she or he heard the spouse share. The process is then reversed, so that Person A receives the affirmation and feeds back to Person B what was expressed.
6. **Wrap-Up (5 minutes)**

- Gather back in the large group. Mention how important it is to express appreciation to our spouses on a regular basis. Such sharing should be specific and relate to what the other spouse would especially like to hear.
- Thank the group for their interest. Conclude with a time of fellowship and refreshments.
Session 2: Building Bridges Instead of Walls

1. Get Acquainted (15-20 minutes)
   Divide into several small groups of three or four. Ask participants to think of a couple they know who has a happy, growing marriage. What is it about such a couple that they especially admire? Share this information in the small groups.

2. Input (15-20 minutes)
   As you begin, ask persons to list some of the qualities they had identified. Mention that one of the important qualities of the growing marriage is that there be a balance between togetherness and separateness.
   - Talk about what each of these words means and why it is so essential:
   - Togetherness (common goals, commitment to the relationship, some similar interests, similar values, and so on).
   - Separateness (the freedom for each person to have an individual identity – in such ways as vocation, unique personality and temperament, different interest, and so on). Give specific examples if possible.

3. Bridge Building Exercise (35-40 minutes)
   Ask that couples sit together. Distribute copies of “Bridge Building Exercise.” Guide them to identify what they have in common with each other, as well as ways in which they are different.

4. Wrap-Up (5-10 minutes)
   Get together back in the large group. Summarize again the importance of learning to appreciate our differences, as well as ways in which we are similar to our spouses. We should avoid the temptation of pressuring our spouses to conform totally to each other, but instead seek to find a healthy balance between togetherness and separateness.
   Conclude your session with a time of fellowship and refreshments.
Session 3: Coping with Stress and Crisis

1. **Get acquainted (15-20 minutes)**
   Divide into small groups of three or four. Having spouses in the same small groups is optional. Ask that persons reminisce about times of crisis they experienced in their families of origin. How was crisis or conflict handled? Did these times of difficulty serve to strengthen or estrange family members?

2. **Large Group Discussion (10-15 minutes)**
   Once you are back in the large group, ask that participants list the typical stresses and crises which can occur in any marriage. List these ideas on chalkboard or newsprint.

3. **Couple Sharing (15-20 minutes)**
   Ask that spouses sit together for this activity. Distribute copies of “Marriage Time Line.” Spouses should each complete the exercise alone and then compare their thoughts with each other. Then they should create a time line with which they both agree. Acknowledge that these difficulties may often initiate times of most significant growth and change in a marriage.

4. **Input (10-15 minutes)**
   Once couples have completed their time lines, get back together in the large group.
   Share your thoughts on some basic principles for handling conflicts and crisis:
   - Acknowledge that the conflict exists. (Sometimes people do not even agree that there is a conflict or crisis.)
   - Identify the key points in the conflict.
   - List alternatives for resolving the conflict.
   - Evaluate, then prioritize the alternatives in their order of preference.
   - Try the preferred alternative.
   - When appropriate time has been allowed, evaluate the effectiveness of that alternative. (Should this plan of action continue, or should another alternative be attempted?)

   Remind the couples that their relationship is more important than any conflict or crisis they may encounter. Acknowledge that some stresses never seem to go away and feel unresolvable.

   Healthy communication skills and the willingness to compromise and be flexible are vital for handling stress. And there is often a need for confession of our frailties and errors to each other and for forgiveness.

5. **Couple Sharing (10-25 minutes)**
   Ask that couples sit together for this activity. Ask that they identify a crisis or conflict they are facing currently in their relationship. If there is no current conflict, ask them to
think of their most recent conflict. Guide them to plan ways to cope with this difficulty, using the guidelines you have presented in this session.

6. **Wrap-Up (5 minutes)**

When couples have completed their sharing, gather back in the large group. Mention again how important communication skills and flexibility are in handling stress, conflict and crisis. And perhaps the most important ingredient of all is the commitment to keep communicating and listening in the midst of those difficult times.

Conclude the session with a time of fellowship and refreshments.
Session 4: Sharing our Faith

1. **Small Group Discussion (10-15 minutes)**
   Begin the session by dividing into several small groups. Make the groups consisting of non-spouses. Ask participants to identify what can make faith and religion a difficult or uncomfortable area for some couples and what makes it positive or comfortable for others.

2. **Large Group Sharing (5-10 minutes)**
   Gather back in the large group. Have volunteers from each small group share their thoughts. Develop a composite list on chalkboard or newsprint.

3. **Input (10-15 minutes)**
   Prepare a brief presentation about the importance of having a common belief and value system. Identify several ways that such a common faith system can be beneficial to couples:
   - Brings sense of unity.
   - Provides a common frame of reference for dealing with conflicts.
   - Provides strength and insight in dealing with conflict and crises.
   - If possible, share personal experiences which reinforce these basic ideas.

4. **Couple Sharing (20-25 minutes)**
   Ask that spouses sit together for this activity. Distribute copies of “A Marriage Inventory.” Guide couples to use this worksheet to evaluate their marriages. Have persons complete the worksheet individually, and then compare responses with their spouses. Encourage partners to focus their discussion especially on any matters for which there seems to be a difference of opinion.
   
   Distribute blank sheets of paper, envelopes and pencils to couples. Ask that each couple work together to write themselves a letter, stating what their goals are for their marriage in the coming year. After the couples have written their letters, they insert the letters in envelopes, seal them, and address the envelopes to themselves.
   
   Then collect letters. (Note: In a few months, mail these letters to the couples as a reminder of the goals they had made for themselves in the workshop series.)

5. **Wrap-Up (10-15 minutes)**
   Thank the participants for their involvement in this workshop series. Ask them to share what has been especially meaningful.
   
   Conclude with thoughts on what other opportunities there will be for the couples.
Next Steps
Consider offering at least one of the following series as a means for couples to keep growing in their marriages:

*Couple Communication* – a 4-session, 12-hour basic course in communication and listening skills. Complete resources are available for leading such a program. Some degree of experienced leadership is essential.

*Evening for Couples* – a 4-session program which developed out of the Marriage Encounter program, along with the creative design of Lyman Coleman. This program does not require experienced leadership but can usually be led by couples themselves.

See the Resources section for details on these materials.
Bridge Building Exercise

1. Identify ways in which each person is unique/different. List these items under each name.
2. Identify ways (similar interests, beliefs, likes, dislikes, etc.) in which the two of you are similar. List these items on the “bridge” between the two names.
**Marriage Time Line**

1. List several major changes or crises (either positive or negative) that have happened to you or your family since you have been married.
   
   1. 
   2. 
   3. 
   4. 
   5. 
   6. 
   7. 
   8. 
   9. 

2. Now plot these events on the time line below. Place the event above the line if it was primarily positive when it occurred, below the line if it was primarily negative, and on the line if it was neutral (see sample time line).

   ![Time Line Diagram]

   **Date of** ___________________________ **Today's**
   **Wedding** ___________________________ **Date**

3. Now compare your time line with your spouse's. Then work together to develop a composite time line that represents all of the events from both time lines.
A Marriage Inventory

1. Circle a number which indicates your response to each statement as it relates to your marriage.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NOT YET</th>
<th>MOSTLY UNSATISFACTORY</th>
<th>ACCEPTABLE</th>
<th>VERY SATISFACTORY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. We are &quot;unhooked&quot; from our parents; they treat us as adults.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. As a couple, we have a lot of fun together.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. We share many of the same values.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. We share the same religious beliefs.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E. We have worked to develop healthy communication skills.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F. We cope with crisis and stress constructively.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G. We have a satisfying sex life.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H. Our needs for affection are met.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. We regularly express appreciation to each other.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J. We encourage each other to grow personally.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K. We each have outside interests.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L. We maintain a healthy balance between our marriage relationship and other aspects of our lives (jobs, children, etc.)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. Now total the score of the numbers you have circled. Where are you on a scale of 0 to 60? ________.

3. Now compare your responses with your spouse's and discuss any differences.

A Church Guide for Strengthening Families by Jim Larson
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