apply what they learn tend to gain greater knowledge and feel more equipped to integrate relationship education into their services. This, in turn, influences their ability to integrate once returning back to their agency. Those who reported greater confidence in their ability to integrate relationship education following the training experienced an increase in integration activities once returning to their agency.[24]

Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction

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After several members of the Department of Rehabilitation and Correction (ODRC) attended an Integration Institute, their program director and program administrator worked closely with the Resource Center's project director to develop a strategic plan for the department. To date, they have held five community engagement events to drive a strategic plan for how to better facilitate healthy family engagement and interaction. Families of the incarcerated, various community agencies, and professional personnel were invited to attend and provide their opinions on the challenges of staying connected to incarcerated individuals as well as on the resources available to help them. The input helped the Department of Rehabilitation and Correction determine the next steps to take in facilitating healthy family engagement. Along with the community conversations, they held eight prison focus groups at seven different institutions across the state. The purpose of the prison focus groups was to learn from participants how prison has affected family engagement. They have talked with and surveyed both male and female offenders from high and low security facilities.

The information gathered from these forums will be used in conjunction with the data gathered via their Survey of Incarcerated Parents (ODRC 2014) and the Family Engagement in Prisons program review (ODRC 2014). The expected outcome is a comprehensive review of practices and protocols with specific recommendations for what the department can do to improve family engagement in facilities and in the community.

ODRC also partnered with a fellow Institute alum from the Marriage Resource Center of Miami Valley on placing RingsChat cards—these are small cards designed to help facilitate meaningful conversations between people—above the phones and in visiting areas in prisons. In the future, they plan to partner with correctional facilities to pilot a program that would incorporate the RingsChat videos that accompany the cards.

Studies also show that openness to new experiences is associated with the acquisition of new skills.[25] For example, participants who perceived their agency to be open to new ideas, programs, and ways of serving clients' needs also shared that they felt more able to integrate healthy relationship education as a result of attending a training. Those who integrated relationship education following the training felt an increased sense of competence and skill from the training and perceived their agency to be open and "ready" to address situations in a new way. Often participants felt their agency was "open" and "ready" because of buy-in from their agency leadership or administration.

Collaborating with others, whether in the same agency or across several agencies, is another key strategy to efficiently address the many needs of families and children through healthy relationships. Not only can collaborations address multiple needs, but they can also play a significant role in reaching clients more effectively.[26] Readiness to collaborate has been linked to an agency's context (their resources, etc.), their intrapersonal sources (leadership skills, values, etc.), and interpersonal sources (previous experiences collaborating, group size, etc.).[27] Interestingly, collaborative readiness (i.e., use of collaborations to get things done, leverage resources, and accomplish mutual goals) is linked to greater understanding of integration of healthy relationship education and personal competency to integrate.[28] In essence, the more often collaborations occur with others the more likely providers are to experience

growth in their skills and ability to integrate relationship education. Thus, when more people are working together to integrate, they are able to make greater strides toward integration.

> **South Carolina Child Support Services**
>
> A stakeholder who participated in an Integration Institute shared information he learned with his colleagues and peers after returning to his agency. He also built a collaborative partnership among several fellow Institute attendees. They developed a joint action plan and worked together to carry it out. The group was comprised of stakeholders from Child Support Services, the Department of Social Services, the Department of Corrections, and the Center for Fathers and Families. Together they made plans to integrate both relationship education and fatherhood information into the services being offered within each of their agencies.
>
> The Center for Fathers and Families implements a fatherhood program with a healthy relationship component. The program also includes parenting, economic stability, and job readiness guidance. Others within the partnership are now able to reach out to the Center for assistance in offering these programs to their target audiences, such as non-custodial parents. The Institute attendee from Child Support Services was also invited by a fellow attendee from the Department of Social Services to join the state's Trauma Management team, a group that aims to create a model for trauma-informed care statewide.

Strategies to Integrate Relationship Education

The Resource Center promotes the integration of healthy marriage and relationship education into safety-net service systems as part of a holistic approach to strengthening families. Integration can take place in a variety of settings based on local strengths, needs, and capacity. The specific steps taken to integrate relationship education will most likely be based on an agency's service delivery system and the resources they have readily available. For some, the best approach may be offering handouts during client or in-home visits. A handout on the core relational skill of communication (https://goo.gl/wNfA3r), for example, provides clients with succinct, easy to understand tips for communicating in a healthy way, like by receiving messages through listening silently and reflectively. This type of integration, called basic engagement, is often the lowest-cost approach to increasing public awareness of relationship education. Agencies can also adapt or tailor existing materials to meet their needs instead of developing entirely new materials. For others, the agency may have the capacity to foster partnerships with community agencies that can teach healthy relationship workshops or classes to their clients. Community asset mapping, a process to help a community use its resources to develop a plan, is a good place to start when attempting to identify potential partners that serve the same population and have related goals. Still others may be ready (and able) to implement fully, training their own service providers to discuss and teach healthy relationship skills as part of service delivery.

These three integration strategies are referred to as the "levels of integration" to describe how integration can exist in different forms. Full integration is not the ultimate goal for all agencies, rather, the right level depends on individual factors like the agency's service delivery model and level of interaction with clients. Staff within an agency will have a good sense of which levels are right for them and their clients. A combination of all three might also be what an agency needs. The initial strategy for integration will grow and evolve as the agency and its clients' needs change and as resources change or become available. For stakeholders who may not be sure where to start, the Resource Center offers several resources to 1) help agency staff assess their beliefs and attitudes about relationship education and healthy relationships, and 2) equip an agency to be fully prepared to integrate. Some of these resources are detailed below.

Free Technical Assistance

The Levels of Integration chart shows the three levels of integration:

- Basic engagement,
- Partnerships, and
- Full integration.

It gives examples of the types of free technical assistance that the Resource Center provides at each level. To view the chart, see:

https://www.healthymarriageandfamilies.org/stakeholder-levels-integration

Assessments

Relationship Education Assessment. The purpose of the Relationship Education Assessment is to help determine how integrated relationship education is within an agency's services. This assessment is designed to help identify areas for personal development in providing relationship education or assessing staff development needs at the agency or organizational level. The assessment asks about knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors regarding healthy relationships, relationship education, and relationship skill-building activities. If possible, the assessment should be used with individuals from a variety of positions in the agency or organization. This will help give a more accurate picture of individual and agency-wide strengths and areas where there is potential for growth.

To access the Relationship Education Assessment, see: https://goo.gl/5vibTr

Readiness Assessment. The Readiness Assessment is designed to assess an agency's level of readiness for integration of relationship education into the services provided. The assessment is broken into four categories of readiness: individual readiness, agency/

organizational readiness, collaboration readiness, and awareness of Resource Center resources. By examining these four categories, an agency can see a more nuanced picture of their readiness to integrate relationship education and pinpoint where there may be barriers to integration. Understanding the levels of readiness within an agency gives staff members a clearer idea of the steps to overcome barriers.

To access the Readiness Assessment, see: https://goo.gl/kPrzr1.

Suggested Resources

First Steps to Integrating Healthy Marriage and Relationship Education. This Resource Center webinar highlights the planning and development stages of integrating healthy marriage and relationship education and features speakers who have launched integration efforts in different settings. Speakers describe how relationship education fits with their agencies' missions, what their initial development looked like, and where they see their efforts heading in the future.

To watch the First Steps webinar, go to: https://www.healthymarriageandfamilies.org/content/first-steps-integrating-healthy-marriage-and-relationship-education-may-14-2013

The Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood Initiative. Integration of relationship education may be new to an agency, so for those who would like to learn more about the network of organizations across the United States who share a common interest in improving the lives of children through healthy relationships, visit the website for this initiative: http://www.acf.hhs.gov/ofa/programs/healthy-marriage

The website provides a comprehensive list of healthy marriage and relationship education programs, information about responsible parenting, and resources on job and career advancement activities—all of which contribute

to improving children's and parents' overall well-being.

The Resource Center's Virtual Training Center. Promoting relationship education within an agency might seem daunting, but interested stakeholders can access free training through the Resource Center's Virtual Training Center (VTC). The course *Integrating Healthy Relationship Education: A Course for Stakeholders* shares effective ways to integrate relationship education. The VTC also offers the course *Strong Relationships: Strengthening Individual and Family Well-Being,* which teaches seven key components of healthy relationships, and includes tools and resources.

To register for the VTC, see: https://www.healthymarriageandfamilies.org/virtual-training-center

National Association for Relationship and Marriage Education. The National Association for Relationship and Marriage Education is located at http://www.narme.org/ and offers resources on topics such as new ways to collaborate with other organizations, what local trainings are being offered on healthy marriages and relationships, and information on public policies that strengthen families.

Conclusion

Developing healthy relationship skills is an important part of a holistic approach to strengthening families. By integrating relationship education into existing services, those who would not typically be exposed to relationship education are given the opportunity to improve relationship skills through the service delivery systems they are already accessing. Relationship education can improve couple relationships, increase the ability of parents to build and model healthy relationship skills for their children, and improve family stability. These critical skills can also enhance the employee-employer relationship and help

support families as they work to achieve self-sufficiency.

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