
**Promoting Child Health and Safety:
Why Healthy Couples, Co-Parenting, and Marital Relationships
Matter to Caregivers and Children
Webinar Question and Answer (Q&A)**

Monday, June 25, 2012 2:00-3:30 PM ET

Question: How did you start the Smart Steps to Healthy Relationships initiative in Utah and how did you get all the agencies to share a common agenda?

Answer: *From Brian Higginbotham Ph.D., Associate Professor and Extension Specialist, Utah State University:*

To the first part of the question—how did we start—we were fortunate in that there was already an initiative in place that Governor Mike Leavitt and Jackie Leavitt had set in motion about 14 years ago. It was nothing extremely formalized, nor at the scope of which we are currently providing, but there was some RFPs that came out from the federal government, and we applied for them and then fortunately were funded. And so we used those federal funds in conjunction with the Governor’s Commission on Marriage—which is now called the Department of Workforce Services’ Commission on Marriage—to leverage other community resources to get what we have now.

In terms of getting everyone on the same page, I don’t know that I would say that we’re there yet. Everyone has different agendas and different missions, but there are commonalities amongst all of those. We don’t make an effort to have a lot of meetings where everyone tries to get it onto the same page on all issues, but pretty much everybody who deals with families wants kids to grow up and be successful and happy. That’s the commonality that we really build on. So as we approach different social service agencies and department administrators from that angle and they like it because they care about kids as well. Then they’re able to show the research that discusses how healthy relationship programming and marriage education for the adults can lead to better skills in the home and a warmer, more supportive environment. It’s not a tough sell for them to want to be part of the initiative, although they may not always have the funds to do something large scale. Simply having their support through letters of support and memorandums of understanding can go a long way when trying to secure funding from sources that require a state or community buy-in.

Question: In the webinar, Colleen mentioned that Adoption Resources of Wisconsin has created a curriculum utilizing Dr. John Gottman’s “Sound Relationship House Theory.” Is this curriculum available for other communities and is it free?

Answer: *From Colleen Ellingson, Executive Director, Adoption Resources of Wisconsin:*

Yes, it is available to other communities. We have a license agreement with people and training for facilitators before they use it. We think it's really important that it is available to others.

I'm sorry though, it's not free. It's relatively low cost I would say, but it is not totally free because we need to keep investing in enhancements to it. So there is a small cost yearly to use it, but it does not affect the number of participants who do it.

Question: Why did Adoption Resources of Wisconsin choose to utilize group workshops over couples counseling or individual assistance?

Answer: *From Colleen Ellingson, Executive Director, Adoption Resources of Wisconsin:*

Great question, I think that we had done enough training over the years to know that we really like doing group training. We knew that there were a lot of therapists out there in the state of Wisconsin, but nobody was actually doing group training specifically for families who had adopted kids from the child welfare system in this method. And so it really was the one that we really wanted to focus on, partially because we really think that by bringing a number of people together in a room then collective support for each other really happens, and we would not get that through some of the other modalities.

Question: You don't mention using any licensed parent or family educators in this teaching. Is there a reason that resource has not been used? For example, if I were encouraging teaching in nutrition, I'd look for someone with training in that.

Answer: *Robyn Cenizal, CFLE, Project Director, National Resource Center for Healthy Marriage and Families:*

Whenever we're talking about integrating healthy marriage education skills, who you need teaching it depends on what type of program. There are certified family life educators and there are also parent family educators associated with the cooperative extension system that I mentioned earlier, and those are certainly folks who could be tapped to provide this type of education, but many of the curricula don't actually require that level or a specific background in teaching parent education or family life education in order to teach them.

The way the curriculum is designed makes a big difference. Colleen [Colleen Ellingson, Executive Director, Adoption Resources of Wisconsin] did mention that they do a certification program, and many of the family and healthy marriage education programs that I'm familiar with also do a certification type program, more to make sure that the people who are facilitating the learning experience understand the concept of facilitating versus trying to be the expert at the front of the room. I think that that's somewhat different than some of the more academic programs that you might be thinking of.

From Ted Futris, Ph.D., Training and Technical Assistance, National Resource Center for Healthy Marriage and Families:

I would just echo and say that a lot of the curricula that are out there provide training for professionals with backgrounds in working with families. I think sometimes because of the clientele you work with and the way you deliver services, you don't have the time and the opportunity to bring in someone else, and you have the trust and rapport already established with the client or the family, and it may be better received from you than from another stranger, despite their professional training and background.

Some of the curricula out there provide background materials for you to self-train, and many of us in the safety net and safety stakeholder arena have experience and education and training, so we can read through these curricula and materials to self-teach or teach ourselves. But when in doubt and or when uncomfortable, do look for professionals who are in the community who are trained in certain curricula.

Sometimes you can find that information on the website of a particular curriculum, where they will provide a list of trained professionals in your area. Robyn [Robyn Cenizal, CFLE, Project Director, National Resource Center for Healthy Marriage and Families] mentioned earlier that identifying and reaching out to your local cooperative extension service in your state or in your county might be a potential resource. They may have individuals who are trained or at least know of those who might be trained and available in your area.

Robyn Cenizal, CFLE, Project Director, National Resource Center for Healthy Marriage and Families:

I would also add that one of the distinctions between healthy marriage education as a skill that can be integrated, and family counseling or couples counseling or something like that—a therapy session where certainly a higher level of credentialing and experience is necessary—is that in healthy marriage education, the skills we are trying to integrate into the safety net service delivery system should be viewed as an opportunity to share information and facilitate a learning experience, not that those who are actually providing the training to the expert if you will on the topic.

Question: Who should I contact if I have more questions about this webinar?

Answer: Visit the National Resource Center for Healthy Marriage and Families website at <https://healthymarriageandfamilies.org/> or email us at info@HealthyMarriageandFamilies.org.