Healthy Relationship Education –
What, Why, and How It Relates to Strengthening Families

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Webinar Transcript Provided by PGi Global

Operator: Good day and welcome to the Healthy Relationship Education What, Why and How it Relates to Strengthening Family conference call.

Today’s conference is being recorded. At time I would like to turn the call over to Andrea Strahan. Please go ahead ma’am.

Andrea Strahan: Thank you Rochelle and hello everyone. I’d like to welcome you to the National Resource Center for Healthy Marriage and Families Webinar entitled “Healthy Relationship Education What, Why and How it Relates to Strengthening Families”.

My name is Andrea Strahan and I am part of the Resource Center Team. I’d like to thank everyone for joining us today and before we get started with the presentations I’m going to go over a few housekeeping items for today’s Webinar.

The audio for today’s Webinar will be broadcast through your computer speakers. We will not have a call in number so please make sure the volume on your computer speakers is turned up so that you can hear the presentations.

New featured resources that will be discussed in today’s Webinar are available for you to download from the pod in the top right corner of your screen designated with the word “Files”.

Please click the name of the file you wish to view and then the Download button to open or save a copy of the resource to your computer.

These resources and the video shown today will also be available on our Website at healthymarriageandfamilies.org.

We will be taking questions at the end of the presentation and we encourage you to submit any questions that you have throughout the duration of the Webinar.

To do this find the question and answer pod designated by the letters Q&A in the bottom right portion of your screen.

Type your question into the open field at the bottom of the Pod and then click the Send question button or press Enter.

You will receive an automatic reply thanking you for your question and your question will be forwarded to the moderator.

A recording of this presentation the slides a transcript and the question and answer document will be posted to our Website Healthymarriageandfamilies.org within about ten business days.
Our speakers today will be Robyn Cenizal, Project Director for the National Resource Center for Healthy Marriage and Families, Debra Gilmore, Family Safety Expert at the National Resource Center for Healthy Marriage and Families, Ted Futris, Training and Technical Assistance Expert from the National Resource Center for Healthy Marriage and Families, and James P Marshall, Associate Professor of Life - of Family Life at the University of Arkansas.

So with that I will go ahead and turn the call over to Robyn Cenizal, Project Director here at the National Resource Center for Healthy Marriage and Families. Robyn?

Robyn Cenizal: Thanks Andrea and welcome to all of you. We appreciate you taking time to join us today for this Webinar.

Today’s Webinar we hope to answer the following questions. What are the skills that make up healthy marriage and relationship education?

How does healthy marriage and relationship education affect children, families and communities?

Why is healthy marriage and relationship education important? What is your role as a service provider? And what are strategies for integration and how the Resource Center can help?

We are excited to introduce to you the National Resource Center for Healthy Marriage and Families for those of you who have not participated in any of our Webinars or visited our Website in the past our mission is connecting healthy marriage education skills and Safety-Net services as an integrated approach to strengthening families.

So to help you have a little context for what we do we want to tell you about the things that we offer at the Resource Center, research that supports and promotes integration of healthy marriage education skills, resources, tips and tools to use and share with the families you serve and training and technical assistance to support stakeholders like you as you work to implement integration strategies.

So you’re going to hear throughout our call today you’re going to hear about integration strategies. You’re going to hear what is healthy marriage education.

You’re going to learn about some of the resources that we have that you can easily download such as the files that are here in our Webinar today and also other resources.

So let me start by asking you a poll question, which of the following attributes do you think are the most important attributes of a healthy relationship?

Take a second and answer these, communication, mutual respect, financial stability, shared values?

We will take just a few more seconds.

Great, so it appears that 73.4% of you believe that it’s communication. And we also have 18.7% believe mutual respect. We have one who believes in financial stability and 6.25% that believe it’s shared values.
Well the truth is that all of these are correct. The question becomes interesting when you ask about what is most important because that varies from person to person.

But when talking about what are the attributes of healthy relationships all of these issues are important.

Our personal experience is determined for us individually what are the ones that we think are the most important and those could be experiences that you are around as a child, relationships that you grew up around or could be personal experiences that you had as an adult to help you determine what are the most important attributes to you.

When we think about what it takes the underlying skills for most of these attributes are things like positive communication and conflict resolution skills.

So when we think about all of these different attributes of healthy relationships we also have to address what are some of the family stressors?

So when thinking about family stressors even families that have healthy relationships experience stress -- parenting, finances -- all of these different issues that are going on in families can be very stressful.

Parenting can be stressful and even more so for single parents or for those in stepfamily or blended family situations.

Finances, especially in today’s economy can be extremely stressful. As a matter fact financial issues are often cited as the primary reasons for couples divorcing.

The natural process would be for us to learn these positive communication skills, conflict resolution skills and even these core skills related to parenting and financial management. The natural process would be for us to learn these in our family of origin.

But if we don’t learn that there for whatever reason whether it be parents who didn’t have those skills to share with us or it just be a matter of dysfunction in families that disrupted that natural process our society doesn’t typically offer another place for us to learn these skills.

So today’s Webinar is going to give you some information on how we can help to integrate the skills into Safety-Net service delivery systems.

Debra is going to tell us a little bit more about what is healthy marriage and give us an overview of these skills. So with that I’ll turn it over to Debra.

**Debra Gilmore:** Thanks Robyn. So first really take a look at the logical components of healthy marriage and relationship education. The Resource Center starts with the foundation of knowing what a healthy marriage is defined as.

And the Federal Office of Family Assistance Healthy Marriage Initiative defines healthy marriage by two principles or outcome. It is mutually enriching and mutually respectful.

At its core across cultures geography, across political views these are two central and shared experiences in a healthy marriage.
And the skills and knowledge at a couple needs to achieve those two shared experiences have already been touched upon by Robyn. These form the basis for all healthy marriage programming.

Healthy marriage and relationship education focus on increasing knowledge and skills in two core areas, communication and conflict management, so it’s great to see that 3/4 of you felt that communication was so critical to a healthy marriage.

Communication includes the way that a couple communicates such as consistently focusing on positives about one another and having to weigh or mutual exchanges of information when you are communicating.

And it can also cover the key areas that couples should be communicating about, for example core value, family background and spending habits.

A healthy marriage of relationship education also typically focuses on application of these skills and increasing knowledge in two critical areas, money-management and bearing children -- those common sources of tension in a committed relationship.

Once you understand or see what healthy marriage and relationship education is I think it’s easy to understand why myths and concerns about it are untrue.

It is not all about coercing people to marry or remain in an unhealthy relationship. And this means that it does not attach a stigma to divorce nor does it limit anyone’s access to divorce.

And that’s not to say that there - there might be programs out there that seem to do just that but when the Resource Center talks about research-based healthy marriage and relationship education it is not talking about those programs.

Healthy marriage and relationship education does not exist to hook up singles nor does it exist to diminish the work, the hard work of individual single parents. It is a research-based prevention tool.

There are out of the norm tragedies that serve as reminders that there is no single panacea for complex issues and outliers in society.

But the more that safety-net service providers can strengthen the safety-net the wider I think it can be thrown.

In summary relationship, healthy marriage and relationship education is part of a holistic preventive approach to strengthening families.

It serves as part of your pre-prevention toolkit for family loving and self-sufficiency meaning that there are research-based risk reduction benefits for children families and communities. And Ted’s going to elaborate on this benefit in just a minute.

Healthy marriage and relationship education is generally not appropriate as an intervention for intimate partner violence nor is it a solution when a child is in immediate danger for example due to child maltreatment.

I will note there is some very preliminary research that shows potential promise for providing healthy marriage and relationship education to couples who are experiencing what’s been labeled as situational couple violence.
This is a term that was coined by Michael Johnson to refer to couples who are mutually aggressive towards one another.

They - where there is no dominating or exercising of coercion or control by one partner over the other. And it’s a very important distinction.

There have been a couple of studies that looked at the use of healthy marriage and relationship education with this non-power and control dynamic population.

And those couple of studies did show an increase in knowledge and marital satisfaction among the couple.

But that data I would caution is very new and we have - we still have much to learn all about that particular area.

All agencies working to strengthen families should have protocols for what to do when a family member is in immediate danger. And I’m sure that’s not news to anyone on this call.

A final note we do have resources on our website and in our virtual library that point you to national organizations, military family resources and to hotlines to add to your safety intervention toolkit along with that prevention toolkit. And with that I’m going to turn it over to Ted.

Ted Futris: Thank you Debra. And what I'll talk about for a few minutes here is how does healthy marriage and relationship education effect children and families and communities?

And before getting started I wanted to throw another poll question up there and ask you what you think, how much do you think family fragmentation costs US taxpayers, if you'll take a moment here to cast your vote.

Already we've got some mixed views on this. And we have about roughly almost 1/3 who feel one to 50 billion and about half between 50 to 100 and roughly about a quarter who feel that it's more than 110 million.

And if we go to the next slide you will see in fact the total cost to US taxpayers each year for family fragmentation runs around $112 billion. And the cost, you know, these are real and quantifiable costs.

The United States has estimated to spend that $112 billion per year. The figure includes direct, indirect costs associated with taxpayer expenditures for anti-poverty Safety-Net provider services to court and through lower level of taxes.

Work loss is associated with marital problems and that converts into a cost of approximately $6.8 billion per year.

And these estimates and others suggest that although relationships are private decisions their outcomes have public consequences.

Even small increases in the stable marriage rate could result in larger - large return to taxpayers.
So what does the research show in terms of the benefits of strong families, healthy marriages for children, parents and communities?

Well we know the research shows that on average stable committed relationships impact children emotionally and behaviorally.

Those in stable committed relationships tend to be - have fewer emotional problems and behavioral problems. They do better in school. On average they are less likely to use drugs, engage in delinquent behaviors or participate in risky sexual activities.

And as well they are also less likely to have sleep or health problems. And that's really important particularly given today’s obesity and health epidemics. Research is showing really strong links between quality of sleep and obesity risk.

And also healthy marriages, healthy stable committed relationships on average help promote healthier parents.

They live longer on average. They experience lower levels of stress and lower incidences of mental health issues.

Also stable committed relationships on average promote adults who are more likely to own a home, be financially stable, to engage - to be engaged in their community and volunteer.

And so just simply pulling together those resources, working together as a team really promote that stability of the family which for those in child welfare services and related services really try to promote stability and permanency for children.

Help promoting healthy couple relationships can really help be one way to reach that goal.

Healthy communities are also benefited or communities are also benefited by healthy couple and marital relationships.

On average we see lower rates of absenteeism from work, less job turnover, fewer accidents, higher levels of productivity as well as, you know, there’s supplementary data showing links between lower divorce rates and teen pregnancy rates.

So overall healthy couple and healthy marriages on average really promote healthier, stronger communities as a whole.

Even small increases in stable marriage rates could result in large returns to taxpayers.

Next we'll talk a little bit about the research on, you know, the benefits of healthy marriage and relationship education.

As Debra pointed out what healthy marriage and relationship education involve, there has been substantial research now conducted over the last several years showing both short term and currently now, you know, long term benefit that these skills that couples acquire during these programs, during these services not only are - result in some immediate positive outcomes for couples in terms of the quality of the relationship but that we see that they continue to use these skills. And we see some lasting effects of these outcomes.
And there have been some studies done recently that have analyzed these results across multiple studies to show the consistency in these positive impacts that healthy marriage relationship education have shown to impact relationship quality and communication skills.

Importantly these results are valid with both low and middle income families. So it’s not just benefiting one type of couple or a family. But it really is having an impact across the board for the various families that we all work with.

So these results show that healthy marriage relationship education is important. It’s an important prevention focused holistic approach to strengthening families.

And you can learn more about these results that I’ve shared. They’re summarized wonderfully in one of the fact sheets that we have available by Dr. Brian Higginbotham, Why Marriage and Relationship Education Matters to Safety-Net Service Providers.

This is one of the fact sheets you can download at the end of this Webinar and read through in more detail.

Now with that I’d like to transition to a video of why healthy marriage and relationship education is important.

**(Video) Rosalind Ginyard:** We think it’s important to the stakeholders because they are the ones we are trying to reach to incorporate marriage and relationship education in the work that they are already doing.

**(Video) Narrator:** Childbearing, relationships, marriage, and divorce are personal and private decisions…

**Ted Futris:** It does seem we are having some technical difficulties with our video, Andrea would you like us to proceed forward?

**Andrea Strahan:** We apologize everyone for the technical difficulty. The video talks about the perspective from the stakeholders about why healthy marriage and relationship education are important. It has some wonderful information and interviews in it and we’re going to have this available on our Website so we really encourage everyone to visit the website when you have a chance.

Again that’s Healthymarriageandfamilies.org. And we really apologize for the technical difficulties. And then James would you like to go ahead?

**James Marshall:** Sure, sure I’d be happy to do that. We’re going to start with a poll question as well. And that - somebody drop that poll question in there?

All right there it is. So the poll question is healthy marriage and relationship education can only be facilitated by a licensed therapist? Those are the easy one. Is it true or false?

Great, it looks like there’s quite a bit of consensus on this one. It looks like the majority of the respondents said that that’s false.
In other words you don’t have to be in a licensed therapist in order to provide relationship and marriage education to others.

So there’s an important question here. And that question is, you know, why as a Safety-Net service provider should I even attempt to promote healthy relationship skills when I’m working with parents?

Well my understanding is that one of the primary responsibilities of a Safety-Net service provider is to protect and strengthen the lives of children and families.

And so one important way that that can be done is by helping them have more stable relationships. And research has shown that unhealthy and abusive relationships between parents is detrimental to children’s development and safety.

So helping those couples learn healthy relationship skills really is an effective strategy for improving outcomes for parents and children alike.

There’s a saying that I think rings true here that’s one of the best things that parents can do for their children is to be willing to love one another. Because when the quality of a parent relationship is strong they’re going to be a lot more likely to be more invested in their children and to be more - have more quality parenting.

So let’s move forward and look at this issue. The slides talks about Safety-Net service providers definitely are qualified to teach healthy relationship skills. You know, and you may be wondering well how is that the case?

Well I’m guessing that a lot of you who are Safety-Net service providers probably realize that families with whom you're working and are struggling in their relationships and sometimes some of those clients with whom you're working may even ask you for relationship advice.

And when that happens you may think while hold on, you know, I’m not a relationship expert. How am I going to be of help?

Or you may be thinking well how can I help struggling couples when I’m single, divorced, or when my relationship has its own challenges?

And thankfully Safety-Net service providers don’t have to be relationship experts. They don’t have to have an ideal relationship themselves. And they don’t have to be even in a relationship in order to help couples have stronger more stable relationships. Because the fact is that none of us is in a perfect relationship.

To be helpful you just simply need to be willing to learn, practice, and share a few proven strategies.

The important thing is to share proven principles of healthy couple relationships rather than just sharing your opinion because opinions can get us into trouble. And the research based strategies are those things that have been shown to be effective.

Now some of those ideas have been talked about in today’s Webinar. But certainly we would encourage you to go to the Healthy Marriage and Families Website to check out a lot more ideas and learn more ideas about what you might share with the clientele with whom you work.
It’s interesting that research has shown that lay leaders can teach healthy marriage education skills just as well as most mental health professionals.

And quite simply that’s because marriage and relationship education it’s not therapy. It doesn’t involve diagnosis and treatment.

One way of thinking of this is, you know, just like it doesn’t take a professional chef to teach someone how to prepare a meal, it doesn’t take a trained therapist or a relationship expert to help someone learn the skills necessary to have a better relationship.

And oftentimes as I work with people just in life settings in the trainings that I do, you know, I’ll tell them, you know, I might be perceived as an expert in parenting or marriage and couple relationships or personal well-being and I’ll tell them I’m not perfect in any of these areas but I try and practice what I preach so to speak.

I try and do the best that I can. And I think that really helps set people’s mind at ease.

And so as Safety-Net service providers as you’re working with your clientele I think that’d be probably be a wise thing to tell them.

Say you know what, I’m not perfect in all of these things. I’m just trying to do my best.

And by sharing these ideas with you I’m hoping that you can maybe improve your relationships as well.

All right so the next slide says how to share or teach healthy relationship skills? Well let’s talk about that for a minute.

Sometimes as professionals or as Safety-Net service providers, you know, we might be tempted to see the families with whom we work as the source of problems and maybe see ourselves as a source of solutions.

I’m trade as a marriage and family therapist and there certainly have been times where, you know, families have come into visit with me and I thought, you know, you guys are a mess and I know exactly what to tell you to fix everything.

Well that is a really unhelpful attitude to have and here are a couple of reasons why.

Because the families with whom we work know far more about their own lives, challenges and resources than we do. And any solutions that we try and impose on them without their conviction and commitment to that really are not going to be that effective.

And quite honestly some of the most important answers in any teaching opportunity will come from the families themselves.

So the most important answers are those that represent the family’s best thinking and their commitment to growth.

So one thing that we can do is to help build trust with families and with the couples with whom we work.

So, you know, and any discussion with couples there are going to be some people who don’t really want to volunteer answers, sort of sit back and seem reluctant to answer questions.
And that may be because they’re wondering if they’re going to be embarrassed or corrected or condemned right. And they’re unable to express themselves clearly. If they’re unable to express themselves clearly they may be worrying about being humiliated.

So one of the best things Safety-Net service providers can do to earn trust with couples has to do with the way that they treat them.

You know, it’s natural for individuals to be reluctant to commit until they feel safe. And so what a professional will do is set couples up for success by asking questions that allow for a lot of different answers.

So if you want to ask open ended questions that encourage couples to come up with their own solutions.

So you might ask something like what do you think will work or what have you seen other couples do in this situation or do you have an idea of how to apply this principle? And then after asking those questions you’ll allow time for the couples to respond.

See if you jump in immediately and answer your own question them pretty quickly the couples learn A, you know, they don’t really care what my opinion is. They just want to tell me whatever it is they want to tell me.

So silence is okay because it allows individuals time to think and formulate their own responses.

The second bullet point on this slide says working together to solve problems. You know, Safety-Net service providers have the opportunity to help families solve problems.

And in order to best help them what you have to do is utilize proven research based knowledge about healthy couple relationships like that found on the National Resource Center Website.

Safety net service providers should also seek to draw the best answers and desire for growth out of the families they serve.

When Safety-Net service providers think of their responsibilities in these ways there are several things they can do to bring the best out of the families they serve.

For example demonstrating respect for the efforts, skills, experiences and challenges that families bring.

This can be done by a listening carefully to their comments and offering encouragement. You might say something like you faced so many difficulties or I admire your courage to keep trying or you’ve tried a lot of things to make your life better or you have a lot of good ideas.

See when you say things like that to the families it lets them know that you value their opinion and you - and that you see in them a lot of potential.

Another important thing to do is to be willing to honor the families by inviting them to be creative problem solvers.
So Safety-Net service providers don’t only share information designed to strengthen couple relationships they also invite the families to think of good ways to apply those principles to their own lives.

So you might ask questions like what do you think would work with your family or how would you apply that principle to make your relationship better or what have you learned from your experience or can you think of other ideas that might be helpful?

See the most effective Safety-Net service providers help families find ideas and solutions to problems within themselves rather than just saying here’s what you’ve got to do and if you do it things are going to be great.

Another thing is that we have to honor family members’ efforts in situations where there may be some disagreement.

There may be times when a family member makes a statement that we disagree with. So when this happens a professional will respect the family member’s experience and perspective by validating what they’ve heard while invited them to consider some other possibilities.

For example you may be working with a family and one of the parents says something like well what kids need these days need is a good whipping. And as a Safety-Net service provider you may not agree with that right?

And so what you might say is something like it sounds like you really want your children to respect boundaries. What do you do that works best to help those children value boundaries even when you’re not around?

Or you might say something like letting children know that you’re serious about limits is important. In my experience children are more likely to follow the rules when they understand them and they believe that they’re important. How can we help children with this?

So you don’t say hey yes what they need is a whipping. You don’t say hey that’s totally wrong. You help them think about it in a slightly different way.

Let's take a look at the next slide. The next slide says my relationship isn’t perfect. How can I help couples?

Well if you’re interested in some of these ideas that I talked about we have a tip sheet available for you. You can access that on the Website.

It’s the Healthymarriageandfamilies.org Website. And you click on the library section. And that’s where you’ll be able to find this tip sheet call My Relationship isn’t Perfect. How Can I Help Couples?

So hopefully some of those ideas will be of interest to you. And I think I will turn the time over now to Robyn who has some information for you.

Robyn Cenizal: Thanks James. That tip sheet is also available as a download here is well so I hope folks will take advantage of that.
So what we’ve heard is we’ve heard Debra talk about what is, you know, what are healthy marriages, what is healthy marriage education?

We’ve heard Ted talk about how it makes a difference for Safety-Net service providers. And we’ve heard James talk about our role as stakeholders out in the communities and working with these families and how we can help to integrate these healthy marriage and education skills into service delivery systems.

So I’m going to talk a little bit more about the integration and what that looks like and what it can look like.

So when a resource center talks about integration we basically think of it at three different levels. So basic engagement is level one and that can be as simple as putting handouts in a waiting room.

Or you could have tip sheets for example if you were a TANF agency and you meet with clients one on one you could have a file with various tip sheets that you can simply hand tip sheet on trust or communication to one of the clients that you serving.

So thinking about that is as level one very basic engagement. Level two is partnerships. And what we talk about when we talk about partnerships are developing partners whether it be service providers in the community such as your cooperative extension system or healthy marriage education programs that exist in your community developing those partnerships where you can refer families so that they can access healthy relationship education skills that have already been provided whether it’s parenting financial literacy, whatever those skills might be.

And then we think about level three as full integration. And full integration might look like an environment where you are able to offer workshops to families or it might be one on one.

For example if you’re a child welfare worker and you do in home visitation you might go in and actually have conversations with the family about relationship education.

So for example a child welfare worker going into the home if they see that the outlets are not covered and there’s a toddler in the home that might spark a conversation about child safety.

In the same way if that same worker were to go into a home and identify that there might be a new love interest that the single mom that they’re meeting with might have a new boyfriend in the picture initiating a conversation about that relationship and what the potential impact of that relationship might be on the children in the family would be a simple way to start conversation around healthy relationship education skills.

So in thinking about that taking it just a little more specifically looking at Head Start for example if you were working in a Head Start environment level one might be creating a family resource space that offers handouts for parents on the importance of healthy relationships.

Level two might be developing community partners to provide financial literacy, healthy marriage education, parenting or other workshops that support healthy relationships.
And level three might be actually training the parent liaison at the Head Start program to facilitate healthy marriage education curriculum as part of their family engagement efforts.

Now I hope that kind of gives you a more concrete picture of what we’re thinking about when we talk about these different levels of integration.

So when we talk about integrating into all of these different Safety-Net service delivery systems what we think of is the fact that all of these different agencies have different service delivery systems.

There is service delivery might be direct service one on one, there may be group environments, there might only be Website access.

There are some states who have families sign up for TANF online. So it might be varying from Safety-Net service provider to service provider.

So if we think about how we can integrate on these different levels across all of these different agencies then we actually have an opportunity to create consistent messaging about the positive need for healthy marriage education skills.

As we mentioned early in our conversations today we talked about the fact that typically families would learn these skills within their family of origin.

And we talked about the fact that if you don’t learn it there there really isn’t in a place in our society where you learn it.

Unfortunately what we do have oftentimes is access to these skills in a punitive way. So for example if you get involved with child welfare you might be subjected to parenting classes or if you get in trouble financially you are encouraged to go to financial counseling.

What the resource center encourages is that we make these skills available to families in a non-punititive way through services that they are already accessing.

In that way they’re much more likely to take advantage of these services to access this information to strengthen their own families and to not feel as if it’s something that they have to do because they’ve messed up.

So with that I’d like to share with you we’re going to try another video and I appreciate your patience with our new technology and the fact that we have just created these fabulous videos and we really want to share them with you. So we’re going to take a few minutes and watch this video about the resource center.

(Video) Narrator: Strong families are the foundation of strong communities. Yet many families you serve struggle to achieve self-sufficiency and as service-providers you struggle to provide services to them within traditional safety-net service delivery systems. The National Resource Center for Healthy Marriage and Families works with Federal, State, Tribal, and local government agencies to promote the value of healthy marriage and relationship education skills. We encourage their integration into safety-net service delivery systems as a holistic approach to strengthening the families you serve. We offer a virtual resource center available 24 hours a day that is user-friendly and easy to
navigate. The website also includes success stories and a calendar of upcoming events. Our searchable library has over 300 resources, including research on promising practices that supports the need for and benefits of healthy marriage education skills. The library also includes stakeholder specific products developed by experts in the field, like tip sheets, fact sheets, and research-to-practice briefs. Visit our virtual training center to learn more about free training and technical assistance, including webinars and in-person and online training opportunities. If you can’t find what you are looking for, we have a call center that is staffed Monday through Friday so you can speak to a live person. Healthy marriage and relationship education include interpersonal skills like communication and conflict resolution, as well as critical skills like parenting and financial literacy. These skills serve as the cornerstone of strong families. For more information on healthy marriage education skills visit www.healthymarriageandfamilies.org, info@healthymarriageandfamilies.org, 1-866-916-4672.

Robyn Cenizal: Thank you. I hope you enjoyed that video. And in the video we talked about the services that are providing including training and technical assistance.

One of the files that you have available for download relates to the level of integration that I talked about a few minutes ago.

That handout if you download it, it also lines up what type of training and technical assistance can be provided to you based on the different levels of integration if you're interested in pursuing that within your agency.

So the other thing that I wanted to point out is the expertise behind the resource center. We have expertise around research, program design, implementation, organizational development, policy analysis, public private partnerships, strategic planning and a host of other skills.

Additionally there's expertise around healthy marriage, family strengthening, parenting, asset building, family safety, child welfare, social justice workforce development and anti-poverty as well as others.

In addition to the staff that we have on the resource center we also have access to a cadre of experts around the country that are attached to various universities and the cooperative extension system who are available to assist us in providing you with resources as well as training and technical assistance.

You've heard us talk about all the resources available in our library and you’ve heard several of our presenters today talk about the fact that those resources are research based which we think is significant in your efforts to try to educate your colleagues and your leadership about the importance of integrating healthy marriage education skills into your service delivery systems.

And so with that I am going to take us into a couple of poll questions. And so the first poll question is are you likely to talk with others at your organization about integration of relationship education into your current services or role at work?

Your options are yes, possibly, not sure and no or no vote.
Okay and the next poll question is are you likely to use the National Resource Center for resources or training, technical assistance in the future, yes, possibly not sure, no, or no vote?

Okay we really appreciate your feedback on these poll questions. They will help us to make sure that we do a better job on future Webinars and make sure that we’re meeting the needs of all of our stakeholders.

Before I turn you over to Andrea who’s going to coordinate our moderated question and answer session I’d just like to say thank you once again for joining us today.

Apologize again for our technical difficulties with the video. But as mentioned all of our videos are available in the media gallery on our Website.

And they are a perfect 2-1/2 to three minute video clips that are great for sharing with your colleagues and staff to help them better understand the mission of the resource center as well. So with that I’ll turn it over to Andrea.

Andrea Strahan: Thanks Robyn. As Robyn said we’ll now begin the Q&A portion of our Webinar today.

Just to remind you to ask for questions please find the question and answer pod designated by the letters Q&A in the bottom-right portion of your screen.

Type your question into the open field at the bottom and then click either the Send question button or press Enter.

We’ve been receiving some great questions throughout the presentations today but we’ll continue to take them in and we will try to cover as many as we can in the next few minutes.

So our first question is going to go to Ted. And the question is about the cost of family fragmentation that you referenced.

And it’s asking if you can define how those costs were - how family fragmentation was defined. And it’s also asking how do you know that those costs aren’t attributable to other factors?

Ted Futris: Sure I’ll take that. And if you wouldn’t mind if you could put that slide up on the cost of family fragmentation it might help to kind of see some of those numbers that if that’s possible.

And but briefly, you know, the report is based on calculations. First it takes into account a couple of things.

One the proportion of children living with two married parent households, you know, has dropped basically from 85% to 68% according to census data.

And, you know, roughly more than 1/3 of children are now born outside of wedlock. And so from a combination of both divorce and out of wedlock trend in the US those - you’ve got a lot of services directed, anti-poverty type of services directed to support those families.
And the higher cost to the taxpayers result from those efforts, those programs, those services and you can see some of those on the slide that we have there.

And you can get more of this information also from the original report, the Taxpayer Cost of Divorce and Unwed Childbearing which is really one of the first ever national reports.

And it also provides a wonderful breakdown by state on how these costs are broken down by state and you can access this report from our resource center library.

Again if you were simply to search the taxpayer cost of divorce and unwed childbearing that report will come up for you and you can find that on our library Website.

And sold these cost based - are based on taxpayer revenue loss and the direct cost to taxpayers as a result of expenditures that go towards local state federal taxpayer financed programs.

So I hope that answers your question. If there’s a follow-up question to that happy to address it. But again I think you’ll find the report quite detailed in how it calculates those costs.

Andrea Strahan: Great, thank you Ted. Our next question is going to be for Robyn. Robyn they’re asking is there a curriculum that the resource center recommends?

Robyn Cenizal: Thanks Andrea. Actually we do not recommend a specific curriculum. We do have a guide that looks at curriculum that is free and low cost.

The cap on that low cost figure being curriculum that is available for under - for $300 or less. And a lot of the curriculum is actually free.

The guide breaks down what it - it’s all researched based curriculum but the guide breaks it down by what are some of the contents within the different curriculum.

And the resource center is actually in the process of launching some curriculum that will be available online and free for stakeholders available through our Training and Technical Assistance program.

Andrea Strahan: Great thank you Robyn. James this next question is for you. The question is do you have any tips for serving couples when one is unwilling to actively participate in marriage relationship education?

James Marshall: Do I have ideas for helping couples when one of them doesn’t want to participate?

Andrea Strahan: Yes.
James Marshall: Yes you know, there are some therapists and marriage educators out there that talk about this idea that it, you know, it really takes one to tango.

And what they mean by that is that even if one partner in a relationship doesn't initially seem willing to participate in any way shape or form in either relationship education or counseling if one person is willing to participate that can change the relationship dynamics.

It's sort of that idea of systems theory where a change in one part of the system can affect every other part of the system.

So yes, it can do a lot of good to have the one partner who is willing to participate learn some new ideas to change some ways of thinking, to change their way of doing things and it can change the whole system.

So you don't have to have both couples in order - or both partners in a couple participate in order for it to be effective.

Andrea Strahan: Great, thank you James. That was very helpful.

Ted Futris: Andrea?

Andrea Strahan: Robyn the next...

Ted Futris: And actually Andrea if you don't mind I'd love to add something also to that?

Andrea Strahan: Oh absolutely Ted. Please go ahead.

Ted Futris: Yes I'd love to also encourage our audience to not just think about relationship marriage education as working with current couples but think about it also in terms of working with future couples.

In other words working with clientele say single parents who aren't in established relationships but likely will be in and hopefully not too often out of healthy - unhealthy relationships.

And hopefully they can - you can use relationship or marriage education to teach them what to look for in a healthy relationship, how to establish and build a healthy relationship, deciding not fighting as some - as Scott Stanley and Howard Markman have coined it, to make really wise choices in the relationship decisions they make that put them at low risk but more importantly put their children at low risk for safety issues and promote stable healthy future marriages and relationships.
James Marshall: One other thing I might add adding on to what Ted just sad is that John Van Epp for example has written extensively. He has a book called How to Avoid Marrying a Jerk.

And there’s some great ideas in that book for people who are not yet in a relationship but are dating or think that at some point they will be in a serious relationship.

And one of the key ideas that he shares in that book is that we ought not to let our commitments get ahead of our knowledge.

And so what he means by that is we ought to spend a fair amount of time getting to know prospective partners before we become physically or intimately committed to them in some way. So that’s another great idea as well.

Andrea Strahan: Great. Thank you everyone for those great responses. (Robyn) this next one I think maybe you could address this next one.

The question is can Title I funds be used to support Safety-Net service providers for marriage support services? Funds are generally used for parenting, parental engagement and involvement.

Robyn Cenizal: Yes Title 1 and particularly if you’re thinking about Title 1 dollars for elementary schools or schools within low income challenge communities those Title I funds can be used to through the parent liaison that is usually assigned to the school.

The parent liaison can provide these types of training programs under those funds much like what they do at Head Start -- very similar.

Andrea Strahan: Great, thank you. Our next question Robyn I guess you can go ahead and take this one as well is are there any legal issues to be concerned about regarding marriage support services regarding service providers providing marriage support services?

Robyn Cenizal: Well I think that if we’re thinking about what the resource center is promoting then what we’re really talking about is promoting integration of healthy marriage and relationship education skills.

So what we’re focusing on are the skills not marriage per se. These happen to be the skills that are research based skills that support healthy marriages. And the funds to support the resource center come from healthy marriage, national healthy marriage initiative legislation.

But it really isn’t about promoting marriage. So I think as long as we’re all clear that we’re focusing on those skills and these skills that we have discussed in our presentation communication, conflict resolution, parenting, and financial literacy no I don’t think there are any challenges that we need to be concerned about there.

It’s when you start getting into policy and moral issues that the one can run into trouble.
James Marshall: And just from a therapist point of view if you’re not a therapist you just want to be real candid and upfront and say hey you know what, I’m not a licensed clinician. I’m happy to share with you these ideas on what the research says happy couples do or what works in couple relationships.

I’m not here to diagnose you and I’m not here to provide treatment in any way. I’m not qualified for that and that’s not my role. And then I think you’re on pretty safe ground.

Robyn Cenizal: Excellent point. Thanks James.

Andrea Strahan: Great thanks. So James or Ted maybe you two would want to answer this question. But the next question is is there evidence to support the idea that marriage education is a good strategy for reducing poverty?

Ted Futris: Sure I’m happy to tackle that and James if you want to add in any thoughts on that as well. But there is increasing body of research emerging as a result of those last several years of federal funding that has gone towards the sort of initiatives that has really targeted high risk low resource clientele to promote these skills to form healthy relationships and ideally hopefully, you know, healthy future marriages if that’s something they should - those should choose.

Now is it actually reducing poverty? I think the jury’s still out on that. I think there’s still although the research is able to show that teaching these skills translates into using these skills there still needs to be more research to show if then that results in greater family stability and reduced poverty, reduced cost associated with poverty.

However we do know from longitudinal studies that the practice of these skills in general in a relationship, using effective communication strategies, managing differences and conflicts, you know, keep in mind a lot of conflicts in a relationship is - may not be resolvable.

And so what we try to promote and educate couples on is how to manage differences in healthy ways. And just those sort of skills and understanding how to discuss finances, how to manage stress together, how do parent your children as teens, those skills can be all learned.

And research strong - shows strong links between those practicing those skills and long term relationship and marital stability.

James Marshall: I’m - I agree with what Ted said. One I guess a Website or an article on a Website that I might point you to that would have a lot more information on this subject is the Heritage Foundation.
Their Website I think is heritage.org. And earlier this year I think it was September 6, 2012 they have an article that was called Marriage: The Greatest Weapon against Childhood Poverty.

So they have a fair amount of research that they’ve been done or that they’ve looked at I guess that talks about how strengthening marriage relationships really does have a positive impact on childhood poverty.

Andrea Strahan: Okay great. Thanks. And then our next question is probably (Robyn) or (Debra) either of you if you want to answer this one.

It is we have a very diverse population and a wide range of family parental relationships. How broadly do you define family and marriage?

Robyn Cenizal: Well this is Robyn. I’ll start and then others can feel free to chime in.

As far as the resource center is concerned we don’t actually get into defining family. Again our focus is on integrating healthy relationship education skills.

And as we’ve heard some of the other panels discuss these skills are just as valuable to individuals as they are to couples. Change typically has to be come from the inside out.

So thinking along those lines these relationship skills, communication, conflict resolution they are just as valuable to grandparents who are raising grandchildren, other relatives single parents, yes almost any kind of relationship.

As a matter of fact one of the key things about these types of skills that are so important is that they actually transfer into the workplace.

So communication and conflict resolution skills are just as important among coworkers as they are within the family itself.

So, no, we don’t really get into all of that. We just try to make sure that these skills are made available through Safety-Net service providers for any individuals who would like to take advantage of them.

Debra Gilmore: And this is Debra and I’ll just add that that’s really a part of what the resource center’s purpose is to make these as universally available as possible.

And that’s why the resource center provides training and technical assistance across Safety-Net services because there are so many lives regardless of family structure or other social structure, there is so many different types of lives that are touched by Safety-Net service providers.

So it is about those core and critical skills that we’ve mentioned being universally provided. That’s the ideal to any family regardless of how that family defines itself.
Andrea Strahan: Great thank you. And then for our final question maybe James you would like to take this one. The question is it ever too late for marriage counseling?

James Marshall: Well that’s a tough one. I mean a lot of that depends upon, you know, the willingness of people to work to consider new ideas.

I mean as a therapist I mean I lean towards saying no. You know, it’s never too late. And like I was saying before, you know, it only takes one person to be willing to see things and do things differently. Ideally it’s great if both are willing to participate.

So there’s not a definitive answer a definitive answer on that. You know, there’s always some good that can be done whether that’s improving and saving the current relationship or creating more knowledge and ideas and perspective for a future relationship if the current one by chance doesn’t work out.

But I tell the couples with whom I work that I’m very pro-marriage and I will be the last one to give up on their marriage.

I never tell people yes I think you ought to get a divorce. You know, unless there are cases of abuse and things of that nature that’s a different ballgame.

But just in general if couples are having a hard time getting along I’ll tell them hey I’m willing to work with you as long as you want to. And we’ll do our best to straighten things out but I’m not going to give up on your marriage.

Debra Gilmore: And this is Debra. And I would just add that the reason that we really had James answer that question is because of his licensed background.

If you were a service provider and faced with that question that is the time at which you would want to most likely suggest that that person talk with a therapist or another expert.

And particularly if you are having concerns about the safety or stability of the relationship and feel that it’s beyond, you know, if that person is asking for personal advice like that that’s probably going to be beyond or most likely going to be beyond the scope of what you would be providing in terms of healthy marriage and relationship education.

James Marshall: Yes.

Debra Gilmore: So always feel free to, you know, rely on your resources and make sure that you do have those connections in your community so that you can which we can help you connect to so that you can refer people out when they need more intense support.

James Marshall: That’s a great idea. There’s nothing wrong with saying hey I don’t know the answer to that when somebody asked you a question that you honestly don’t know the answer to.
What you can do is say here’s what I do know. Here’s what the research has shown to be effective. And if they get asking questions that seem very personal as was mentioned it’s perfectly fine to say you know what, let’s find someone else that you can talk with that can answer some of those questions.

Andrea Strahan: Wonderful. Thank you everyone for the wonderful answers and the presentations today.

We’ve had some questions about if the slides from his presentation today will be available and they will.

Please check back to our Website in ten business days. We are going to have a recording and the slides and a transcript and a Q&A document available. So any questions we were unable to answer today will be included in that document.

And again our Website is Healthymarriageandfamilies.org.

And very quickly I’d like to ask everyone to participate in two final poll questions.

Just as a reminder again all of your responses are anonymous and this really helps us plan for future Webinars.

Our first question is I now know more about the resources available from the National Resource Center and how these can assist in the integration of relationship education into my agency service delivery.

And the options there are strongly agree, agree, neither agree or disagree, disagree and strongly disagree?

All right and our next question is would like to know how did you hear about this Webinar today? Was it from our Website, from an email or newsletter we sent out, from another organization’s listserv, from a friend or colleague or from another source?

All right wonderful. Thank you everyone for your participation and for your responses today. We’re going to leave you with our - their contact information up here with our Website our email address and our toll free phone number. So please feel free to reach out to us and thank you again for joining us. Have a wonderful afternoon.

Operator: And that will conclude our call for today. We thank you for your participation.