

Our Home Runs: An Overview of the Supporting Research & Theory

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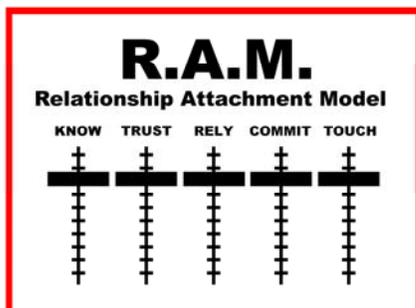
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This paper provides an overview of the Our Home Runs program for families and the current research conducted on the outcomes associated with this program. Additionally, Our Home Runs, along with all Love Thinks programs, is based on the Relationship Attachment Model (RAM). This model has been supported in several research studies and this research will also be briefly summarized.

DESCRIPTION

The Our Home Runs program was developed in 2009 by John Van Epp, Ph.D., and has been taught in the military, by marriage, fatherhood and healthy relationship coalitions and grassroots organizations since 2010. The Our Home Runs program is used in all 50 states as well as in Germany and Singapore.

Our Home Runs is a family program that is designed to be led by an instructor and at least one helper. There are three versions: a family version (*Our Home Runs*), a parent version (*Home Run Parents*), and a fatherhood version (*Home Run Dads*). In *Our Home Run*, the family version, entire families should attend with children ages 5 years old and older (parental discretion for children attending under 5 years old). The program has many activities for the entire family to do together. In addition, there are activities just for kids and some just for parents. However, in the parent and fatherhood versions (*Home Run Parents* and *Home Run Dads*), only parents attend. The activities are modified for parents to do in small parent groups. These two versions also have more parenting content in the five sessions. Finally, a parent-child(ren) last session that can be held as a dinner, an event,



or even a classroom session is recommended for experiential parent-child activities and bonding.

The Our Home Runs program applies the RAM to family/parenting relationships to strengthen the ways that families communicate, respect, work and play together, support and build family resilience, and

express affection and affirmation. The RAM presents a pictorial representation of five dynamic bonds that comprise close relationships: know, trust, rely, commit, and touch. It has the appearance of a graphic equalizer with the five sliders representing the five dynamic bonds of a relationship. Each slider can move up or down indicating the strength of the specific dynamic bond it represents. The RAM is used to define the major constructs that exist in relationships and how they interact to produce different feelings, experiences of vulnerability and resilience, closeness and distance, and various relationship states.

A primary strength of the RAM is its outward simplicity. Although the RAM is a conceptual model that integrates major psychological theories and extensive social and psychological research, to a layperson (or even a child), the model can be understood with little to no explanation beyond the presentation of a picture. Thus, the RAM has intuitive meaning “as is” without much explanation and can be personalized to reflect the strengths and weaknesses of specific relationships because the five dynamic bonds can be moved into constellations that represent different relationship experiences.

This makes the RAM especially beneficial for teaching healthy relationship principles and practices to families including children and those who tend to be more visual learners. Therefore, each of the five sessions expand upon one of the five bonds of the RAM. In fact, the Our Home Runs program provides parents with a practical format for relationship meetings using the RAM. These family “team” meetings have five steps built around the five dynamic bonds of the RAM (in parentheses): *Catch Up* (know): families review what has been happening with each family member; *Patch Up* (trust/respect): families affirm each other's positive actions and accomplishments, reconcile any unresolved issues, reiterate apologies, and review any needed family rules or expectations; *Dream Up* (rely): families plan parent-child and family activities, review chores and responsibilities; *Back Up* (commit): families anticipate upcoming activities and how to support each other; and *Build Up* (touch): families express positive compliments and affection toward each other as their team meeting wraps up.

In conclusion, Our Home Runs is built around a theme of baseball in which parents are compared with coaches, and kids are compared to players. The program has five sessions and each session develops one of the five dynamic bonds or connections that occur in relationships represented by the Relationship Attachment Model. Parents and families are taught the skills that help keep them strong and vibrant in these five connections, as

well as a format for regular family-team meetings.

FAMILY-TEAM MEETINGS

The format for the family meeting (referred to as “family-team” meetings) follows the RAM and is described in the Family Playbook, the workbook binder given to each family. Families use the “go-around” method where each family member has a chance to talk. This family-team meeting format is simple and need only take around 30 minutes a week, with each step in the family-team agenda coinciding with a dynamic bond represented on the RAM. The family-team meeting is summarized below.

- **CATCH UP** (*know*) Talk about what has happened with family members since last family-team meeting (or the last week). Review the schedules and activities of each family member.
- **PATCH UP** (*trust*) Talk about how family members have been getting along and cooperating with both the rules of the household and other family members. Review any chores or responsibilities, and what will be expected between this meeting and the next family-team meeting. Praise family members for their positive attitudes, helpfulness, and involvement. This is also the step to apologize (or repeat apologies) if there have been hurts or offenses throughout the time since the last family-team meeting.
- **DREAM UP** (*rely*) Talk about what each one would like to do as a family. In addition, activities with individual kids are also discussed and planned. Set dates on the calendar for both family and individual activities.
- **BACK UP** (*commit*) Talk about the ways that family members were supported through any challenges since your last family-team meeting. Anticipate the upcoming schedule of events and determine ways to support family members before the next family meeting.
- **BUILD UP** (*touch*) Express your appreciation for family members and what they have done for you since last team meeting. Review any ways since your last family-team meeting that love and appreciation has been expressed within your family, and let those family members know your appreciation.

SESSIONS OVERVIEW

Our Home Runs consists of five sessions, each one built around a dynamic of the RAM. These sessions are:

Session One: Our Family-Team Talks

Your family-team must effectively communicate--both verbally and nonverbally. You must know how to encourage each other, challenge each other, listen and speak to each other; and you must now how to read each other even when words are not spoken. In addition, regular family communication is essential for building strong relationships and preparing and reviewing what happens on the field of play.

This session begins with ways that families are like sports teams. One of the key aspects of any successful team is its chemistry—the strength of the relationships between team members. In the same way, family relationships are most important. The RAM is presented as a practical and visual model of relationship bonds. Five groups of families (or parents in both parent versions) work together to generate practical ways to strengthen each of the five dynamic bonds represented in the RAM. After group presentations, families work on communication skills and deepening their understanding of each other.

- Introduces the RAM and identifies the five crucial bonds in family relationships
- Parents/families generate specific and practical ways to strengthen each of the five bonds represented in the RAM within their own families. Family-team meetings are anticipated and will use this model as an outline of five steps for how families can manage and strengthen their relationships.
- Healthy family communication is explained and practiced with a baseball theme: the one speaking is *up to bat* (using the small rubber bat with the Family Packet) with those who *pitch* questions practicing restatement and active listening.
- Deeper understanding and exploration of family members is generated by the “Ask a Kid” and “Ask a Parent” questions.
- Parents identify things they want to talk more deeply about with their kids and discuss ways to approach these topics with other parents in small groups.

Session Two: Our Family-Team Sportsmanship

Your family must gain and maintain good attitudes toward each other. Family members, like teammates should be your biggest fans! Both parents (coaches) and kids (players) need to practice a mutual respect toward each other, even though you have different roles and responsibilities. However, this requires a clear understanding of each one’s roles and responsibilities, the rules and expectations of the parents, and the consequences of not following the rules.

- Explore ways that positive/ideal coaches and players capture the key characteristics of positive parenting and healthy child attitudes and development.
- Parents work in small groups to identify and define the most important values they want to instill in their child(ren). They discuss ways to accomplish this through communication, family expectations and rules, and discipline. Finally, they explore the ways that they model these values in their lives and with their child(ren).

- A pre-game, game-day, and post-game parenting model is presented for understanding how to develop and maintain respectful and loving attitudes and actions in family relationships. This includes preventative communication, cultivating realistic expectations, positive and effective interventions, apologies and reconciliations, and affirming follow-up strategies. A modified form of this is practiced in Step Two of the Family-Team meetings.
- In the family version, a similar model is presented to kids for ways to respectfully approach and communicate with parents about expectations, rules, and differences.
- A three-tiered approach to consequences is explained and discussed. Parents then work in groups to create a plan to apply this approach that can be used in times of parental intervention with their kids. These plans are presented to the class and discussed.
- In the family version, kits and role plays are used to practice the positive steps for effective communication between parents and kids.

Session Three: Our Family-Teamwork

Your family must work together and also be able to play together. Families grow together as they respect and meet important and personal needs that each member has within the family. Parents must understand the changing needs of their child(ren) and facilitate a respect and willingness to be involved with each other in meaningful ways.

- Parents/Families “reminisce” about their good times with the activity page prompting them to consider and discuss their favorite memories, gifts that they have received, and ways that they have given to others in their family.
- In the family version, families play a game of charades where they act out in front of the other families some of their favorite times together.
- Parents continue to work on identifying the primary needs of each child and goals that they have for those relationships using the All-Star Profile Cards (like a baseball card).
- Families/Parents fill out the “Tickets for a Family Activity” with chosen activities that they will put on the calendar. Consideration is given to the specific needs of each child and also to activities that need to become a part of their routine.

Session Four: Our Family-Team Commitment

Your family must have a commitment and loyalty to each other that supports and strengthens the resiliency of each member and the family as a whole. Each member has different strengths and interests, but the goal should be to build on each member’s strengths so that each member contributes to the whole family while also improving on

his/her weaknesses because of the strengths of the others. Making sure that the needs of the family members are considered and met will build the cohesion of teamwork.

Families also need to regularly “step out of the game” and regroup in a Family-Team meeting. This is where parents and kids can “keep it real,” knowing that they are just with their “teammates.” It is vital to make these family meetings a priority, even mandatory! This will help to ensure that families make plans to be together in many ways--from one-on-one to entire family talks and activities.

- Families/Parents discuss what it means to be resilient, and what are characteristics of a resilient family.
- Families/Parents work on determining a logo for their family that captures the unique strengths and values of their family, and then they decorate a Family-Team pennant with their family name(s) and this logo on it.
- Families/Parents work on the unique strengths of each family member and find a picture that represents this strength. Parents continue to fill out each child’s Profile Card with a description of that child’s positive characteristics and strengths.
- Family-Team meetings are explained (see above).
- Families/Parents conduct a Family-Team meeting in which they practice all five steps.

Session Five: Our Family-Team Spirit

Your family must express appreciation, love and support to each other. The strength of your family bond is expressed by the ways you support and touch each other’s lives. It is this spirit of acceptance and affirmation that creates the feelings of belonging and security within your family.

- Families/Parents review the Family-Team meetings, reiterating the importance of regular family meetings, and the belief that they can run their family relationships rather than expecting relationships to run themselves.
- Family/Parent interviews is an activity where each Family/Parent interviews another Family/Parent to determine that family’s superior strength. After the interview, each Family/Parent completes a Certificate for Superior Strength for the family they interviewed.
- The ways for parents to regularly touch the heart and physically express affection to their kids is added to each child’s Profile Card.
- A Family Awards Ceremony is conducted where each Family/Parent shares with the remainder of the class their Family Pennant, their Acrostic of Personal Strengths for family members, their Tickets for a Family Activity, and the Superior Strength Certificate of the family/parent they interviewed. Some of these

presentations can be integrated into a closing event or dinner with parents and children in the Parent versions.

SUMMARY OF THE LEARNING OBJECTIVES

The Our Home Runs program can be summarized by three primary learning objectives. Each of these objectives is described below.

1. Families/Parents learn a simple but comprehensive picture of the key areas of family relationships that need to be regularly strengthened (portrayed in the RAM). This includes positive communication, clear parental values, respectful negotiations within a balanced authority structure, enjoyable and supportive involvement within the family that meets the unique needs of the family members, and expressions of appreciation and affirmation between family members.
2. Instill and practice the skills that help to strengthen each of the five key areas of family relationships.
3. Provide a plan or format for regular family meetings that emphasize positive appreciation, meeting each other's unique needs, togetherness and respect.

TEACHING & TRAINING METHODS

The Our Home Runs course involves class discussion, small group activities and family exercises.

MATERIALS

Program materials come in English and Chinese.

INSTRUCTOR CERTIFICATION COURSE & PARTICIPANT MATERIALS

Instructor and Family version participant materials include a baseball bag with the following items in it: a rubber bat, a rubber baseball, a pennant, a set of crayons and a Family Playbook/Workbook (only one bag per family).

The Instructor Materials include the all of the participant materials, plus the Instructor Lesson Plans, a 2'x3' RAM chart and a summary of the research that is integrated in this course. Certifications can be accomplished by attending a live certification training or viewing the Instructor Course DVDs that come with the Instructor Certification Course and taking an online test. Instructors also have access to the private Our Home Runs instructor sections of the website for additional free instructional materials, marketing materials and downloads.

OUR HOME RUNS RESEARCH

Since 2010 over one thousand Chaplains have become certified instructors in the Our Home Runs program. The Our Home Runs program as well as the PICK and LINKS

program has been apart of the Chaplain graduate training school curriculum and the Army Strong Bonds program, which seeks to support and strengthen military families and relationships.

A preliminary evaluation of N=655 participants (only the parents completed the survey) of the Our Home Runs program revealed positive results. This first collection of data sought to understand how the Our Home Runs program was received by military families and whether they felt it would help them to improve their family relationships. Additionally, the military wanted to assess whether the Our Home Runs program would be a useful addition to helping adjustments after extended deployments, challenges with single parent families (primarily military fathers), and overall family resilience. The results are summarized in Table 1 and some select participant comments are provided below.

Table 1: Our Home Runs Preliminary Results N=655

	% Agree	% Slightly Agree	% Slightly Disagree
The Home Runs program material was easy to learn	90.8	9.2	
The Home Runs program will help my family manage our relationships better	92.4	7.6	
The Home Runs program provided answers to relevant questions my family faces	96.2	3.8	
I believe the Home Runs program will benefit my family	93.0	7.0	
I increased my confidence of how to effectively manage my family relationship	95.1	4.9	
Overall, I am satisfied with the Home Runs program	95.4	4.6	

Table 2: Our Home Runs Participant Comments

This is some of the best information I have received. Great method of teaching and very relevant and practical.
I really appreciate a standardized model for this program. The Home Runs program is

ideal in the military environment.

This is excellent material. Really good stuff. Thank you for this real GIFT!

The program, HR, I believe is one of the most beneficial resources I have received in the military. I truly believe it will help my family.

An ongoing study with military families is also being conducted. This study is examining whether or not the Our Home Runs programs is effective at improving or strengthening several important outcomes. To date, over 500 military parents have been surveyed after participating in the Our Home Runs program as well as at a 3-month follow-up. All of the outcomes demonstrated statistically significant improvement from time 1 to time 2. These outcomes are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: N = 500 Our Home Runs Outcomes

	Pre-Test	3 month follow-up	t-value
I understand how to maintain a strong family bond	4.30 (1.41)	5.06 (1.04)	8.61
We conduct regular family meetings	4.41 (1.39)	5.09 (1.15)	7.35
We effectively communicate as a family	4.30 (1.34)	5.15 (0.97)	8.85
Members of our family listen to one another	4.17 (1.38)	5.13 (1.02)	9.32
Our family effectively resolves conflict	4.67 (1.27)	5.33 (0.98)	6.97
Our family has a close relationship	4.73 (1.18)	5.23 (1.01)	5.67

*Note: 1= strongly disagree; 2 = disagree; 3= slightly disagree; 4= slightly agree; 5= agree; 6= strongly agree; *items significant at the $p < .0001$ level; all t-values were in the negative direction*

Table 4: N= 1412 Chaplain Feedback to the Our Home Runs Program Training

	%	% Slightly	% Slightly

	Agree	Agree	Disagree
The instructor gave clear explanations of the program material	100		
The HR program will help families manage their relationships better.	100		
The HR program provides answers to relevant questions families face	96.3	3.7	
I believe the HR program will benefit families	100		
I increased my understanding and confidence of how to effectively teach the HR program	95.8	4.2	
Overall, I am satisfied with my training in the HR program	97.1	2.9	

Finally, military Chaplains trained to teach the Our Home Runs program have been surveyed in order to assess the ease of learning and teaching the program. Since 2010, 1412 Chaplains have been trained in the program and have completed a follow-up survey. Overall, the results have been positive and are presented in Table 4 above.

To date, the research conducted on the Our Home Runs program has shown positive effects for families and has received favorable ratings by instructors trained to teach the program. Beyond the research conducted on the effectiveness of the Our Home Runs program is the research conducted on the theoretical model this program, as well as all Love Thinks programs, is based on: The Relationship Attachment Model. The Relationship Attachment Model has been evaluated in a qualitative and two quantitative studies. The results of these studies will be briefly summarized.

RAM RESEARCH

The Relationship Attachment Model (RAM) serves as the theoretical foundation for all of the Love Thinks programs. The RAM provides the theoretical and conceptual structure to the Our Home Runs program. The research on the RAM and the programs which utilize it has been reviewed and presented in the chapter, Relationship Attachment Model (RAM) Programs, in *Evidenced-based Approaches to Relationship and Marriage Education* (Ponzetti, 2016). Furthermore, a qualitative and two quantitative studies on the RAM have been conducted. These three studies will be summarized below.

STUDY 1

Van Epp Cutlip, M.C. (2013). A Qualitative Examination of the Relationship Attachment Model (RAM) with Married Individuals. Dissertation, The University of Akron.

This study explored the theoretical underpinnings of the Relationship Attachment Model, an alternative model to understanding closeness in relationships, using deductive qualitative analysis (DQA; Gilgun, 2010). Qualitative data from married couples was used to explore whether the five bonding dynamics (i.e. know, trust, rely, commit, and sex), proposed by the RAM, existed in their marital relationships. Additionally, this study examined whether the RAM could explain fluctuations in closeness and distance in the couple's marriage and how married couples described and talked about love in their relationship. The findings of this research indicated that the five bonding dynamics put forth by the RAM did exist in marital relationships of these couples and that the complicated dynamics that occur in marital relationships could be captured on the RAM. This research supported findings from past research on close relationships and added to the literature by proposing another model to understanding and conceptualizing close relationship dynamics. The findings of this study are discussed in terms of implications for therapists who work with couples and relationship researchers.

STUDY 2

Van Epp Cutlip, M. (2011). An investigation of the validity of the Relationship Attachment Model-Measure with Married Individuals. Manuscript in Preparation.

For this study, 425 married individuals were contacted and agreed to participate using the Smart Marriages listserv, Love Thinks customer listserv, and by passing out survey invitations at marriage and family conferences in the summer of 2011. Individuals were asked to participate in a 20-minute survey that asked about love and marriage. The majority of the sample was white, female, highly educated, and in their first marriage. On average, respondents had been married 15.7 (SD = 11.8) years and only 35% lived together before marriage. Over half of the sample, 59%, engaged in premarital counseling and 44.5% of respondents reported that they have attended marital counseling at some point while married. In addition, the majority of respondents had no prior familiarity with the PICK a Partner program, Couple LINKS, or the Relationship Attachment Model (RAM). The major findings are below.

- The RAM-M was significantly related to conceptually related measures of love, intimacy, and relationship satisfaction. This suggested that the RAM-M does

provide a picture of the overall experience of love, intimacy, and satisfaction in an individual's relationship.

- Each scale of the RAM-M, representing the 5 bonding dynamics (know, trust, rely, commit, and touch), was significantly related to previously validated measures of each of the 5 constructs. This finding suggested that the RAM-M does provide an adequate measure of each of the 5 bonding dynamics. In other words, the RAM-M does measure know, trust, rely, commit, and touch.
- The RAM-M was able to distinguish between different types of relationships (spouse, close friend, and acquaintance).
- The RAM-M was a powerful predictor of relationship satisfaction and was a more powerful predictor than both love and intimacy.
- The RAM-M scores were significantly different for married versus divorced females, which indicated that the RAM-M distinguished between married and divorced females.
- Using only married females, the RAM-M significantly discriminated between those females who were very satisfied, satisfied, neutral, and dissatisfied in their marriages.
- The RAM-M was a more powerful predictor of relationship satisfaction than the total number of marital problems in a relationship, which suggested that clinical work that focuses on strengthening the marital bond may be more helpful than just focusing on solving marital problems.

STUDY 3

Van Epp Cutlip, M.C. (2013). The RAM-M with Female U.S. Army Soldiers. Manuscript in preparation.

Data from a study exploring the marriages of female soldiers was also analyzed to look at the performance of the RAM-M. Overall, 463 female soldiers: 157 divorced females and 306 married females were included in the study. The sample consisted of 60% Army and 40% National Guard females. Respondents were on average 36 years old at the time of the survey, and 21 years old when they enlisted. On average, females had spent 15 years in military service and married 7 years after joining the military. The majority of females were white and 67% had either attended or completed college. Analyses that compared the

married and divorced females found that divorced females marriage, on average, younger than married females; that a higher percentage of married females had a total household income of 81k and above; and that a higher percentage of divorced females attended marital counseling at some point while married.

Overall, this study found support for the validity of the RAM-M with married individuals. The findings of this study have several implications for clinical work:

- First, the findings suggest that the RAM-M measures the overall experience of love, intimacy, and relationship satisfaction in a relationship. Based on this finding, researchers and clinicians could use the RAM-M as an efficient assessment of an individual's or couples' satisfaction in their marital relationship. Additionally, the RAM-M could be used as an ongoing assessment of relationship satisfaction that could be quickly and easily completed before, during, or after counseling sessions. Furthermore, the higher the scores on the RAM-M the more love and intimacy an individual is experiencing in his/her relationship. Past research has demonstrated that greater relationship satisfaction, intimacy, and love all relate to lower rates of marital dissolution and distress therefore the higher the overall score on the RAM-M the lower the risk of marital dissolution and distress.
- Second, the RAM-M was shown to be a greater predictor of relationship satisfaction than marital problems. Based on this finding, clinicians should take note that just working on improving the problems in the relationship may not be as effective of an intervention as working to strengthen the relationship bond. Overall, the best approach would be to both work on strengthening the relationship bond in addition to solving marital problems.
- Third, the RAM-M was able to show sensitivity to levels of relationship satisfaction in that it significantly distinguished between married females who were very satisfied, satisfied, neutral, and dissatisfied in their marital relationship. Because of this finding, clinicians could administer the RAM-M prior to meeting with a couple and immediately gauge their overall level of relationship satisfaction as well as where vulnerabilities occur in the relationship.
- Fourth, the research demonstrated that the construct validity of the 5 bonding dynamics of the RAM-M were supported. In other words, know really didmeasure how well the couple knew each other, the trust scale was a good measure of the trust

in the relationship, and so on. This finding is important because it lends support to the notion of using the RAM-M as a picture of the overall experience of knowing, trusting, relying, commitment, and touch in a relationship. Therefore, clinicians could use the RAM-M not only as an overall indication of love, intimacy, and relationship satisfaction but also as a picture of the health of each of the 5 dynamic bonds in the relationship. This provides more specific intervention points when working with couples.

- Fifth, participant's with lower levels of the rely dynamic on the RAM-M reported more distress over the inequity in their relationship. Prior research has demonstrated that the experience of inequity in a relationship is related to higher levels of divorce. This finding would allow a clinician to immediately identify if a client or couple is feeling distressed over the inequity in their relationship and ultimately address this in counseling.

SUMMARY

The Our Home Runs program is an evidence-based and theoretically grounded family/parent program. The Our Home Runs program applies the RAM to family/parenting relationships to strengthen the ways that families communicate, respect, work and play together, support and build family resilience, and express affection and affirmation. The effectiveness of the Home Runs program has been demonstrated with parents and families and positive feedback has been provided by over one thousand Chaplains trained to teach the Home Runs program. Finally, the Relationship Attachment Model, the theoretical model on which Home Runs is based, has been shown to be supported in the research.

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