

The Marriage LINKS Program

PROGRAM: Marriage LINKS (Lasting Intimacy through Nurturing Knowledge and Skills). The website is www.lovethinks.com The contact person is the developer of the program, John Van Epp, PhD. He may be contacted at john@lovethinks.com if anyone has any questions.

TARGET POPULATION: The target population of the Marriage LINKS program is all married couples. This program is not aimed specifically at distressed or non-distressed couples, but rather any couple that would benefit from a program intended to enrich their marriage and strengthen the bonds and feelings of closeness that originally brought them together. Participants of this program can be at any stage of their marriage (newlywed, establishing couples, later in life couples, empty nesters, etc.) as well as from any ethnic or religious background.

CONTENT: In the LINKS Program you will learn how to revitalize the closeness of your marriage with the Relationship Attachment Model (RAM) by having regular couple huddles. The RAM provides a simple picture that characterizes the complex interactions of the ways couples know, trust in, rely on, belong to and become intimate with each other in marriage, and the boundaries needed to protect their relationship from harm. The class has a primary take-away with providing couples with a format to talk through the key areas of their relationship every couple of weeks in a loving and intentional way: communication, attitudes, togetherness, sexual relationship and overall closeness.

It is normal to become imbalanced in a relationship in the five areas represented by the RAM. However, the key to success in marriage is to regularly balance those imbalances and avoid small leaks in closeness and togetherness that often lead to major blowouts or crises.

With the LINKS program participants will gain skills for communication, conflict resolution, forgiveness and rebuilding trust, satisfying personal needs, constructing a marriage story, and growing sexually. As stated, the primary take-away is to commit to holding bi-weekly huddles where a simple format is provided for reviewing, adjusting and setting goals in these five key areas (communication, attitudes of respect and appreciation, the ways they are

meeting each other's needs in their togetherness and roles, their commitment and romantic/sexual closeness).

FORMAT: The program has several versions and is formatted in either five or ten lesson workbooks. The classroom time is between 8-10 hours, although the ten lesson format could take longer.

When teaching the program, instructors have a choice as to how to format the delivery. The course sessions can be spread out over weeks, divided into two 4 or 5 hour blocks, conducted as a weekend retreat or even over the course of one day. Again, the format of this program is incredibly flexible and the delivery timeframe and method is completely up to the instructor. It can even be used as a mentoring program.

There are secular versions: an adult version and a military version; and also a Christian version with the program material integrated with a Bible study.

Anyone can become certified to teach the program by purchasing the instructor's certification packet, watching the instructor's certification course and taking an online test. The instructor's certification course is approximately 8 hours in duration. Also, Dr. John Van Epp is available to perform live trainings of future instructors. When teaching the program, instructors have a choice as to how to format the delivery. Regardless, the program consists of five sessions, however these sessions can be spread out over five days, four days, a weekend retreat or even over the course of one day. Again, the format of this program is incredibly flexible and the delivery timeframe and method is completely up to the instructor.

PROVIDERS/TRAINING: Anyone can become certified to teach the program by purchasing the instructor's certification packet, watching the instructor's certification course and taking an online test. The instructor's certification course is approximately 8 hours in duration. Also, Dr. John Van Epp is available to perform live trainings of future instructors.

Providers do not need to be mental health professionals. In order to become certified to teach the Marriage LINKS program it is necessary to purchase the Instructor's Certification Packet, watch the instructor's certification course and then take an online test. This certification allows instructors to purchase future workbooks at a discount as well as to have access to inserts that are available on our website (www.lovethinks.com). If this method is not appropriate to serve

certain grantees' purposes, Dr. John Van Epp is available to perform live trainings of instructors.

COMMENTS: The Marriage LINKS program debuted this year at the 2006 Annual SmartMarriages Conference. Research has been conducted on the RAM with married individuals and both qualitative and quantitative data has been collected, analyzed and will soon be submitted for publication. Statistical evidence has been found for the five factors of the RAM. In addition, construct validity has been established, showing that these bonding constructs are crucial areas of relationships.

The program has been taught in a retreat format to military couples as an approved Army Strong Bonds course, and is taught to all Chaplains in their Basic Chaplain Officers Course in Fort Jackson, SC. It has also been written into several grants. This program is grounded on established research principles of how to remain close and connected throughout a marriage.

This program is especially helpful when used as a complement to the How to Avoid Falling for a Jerk(ette) program because both programs are built around the Relationship Attachment Model (RAM). This allows cohesiveness between the messages taught in the programs and enhances a couple's understanding of relationships with those who went through the PICK program as singles.