

The PICK a Partner Program

PROGRAM: How to Avoid Falling for a Jerk(ette). Also referred to as the PICK a Partner (or PICK for short--Premarital Interpersonal Knowledge and Skills). The website is www.lovethinks.com The contact person is John Van Epp, PhD. He is the developer of all Love Thinks programs and may be contacted at john@lovethinks.com for questions.

TARGET POPULATION: The 5-lesson or 10-lesson course (12-hour that can be abbreviated or expanded to 24 hours) was developed for singles and singles-again of all ages (youth, emerging unmarried adults, never-been-married adults, and single-again adults). The program and the format of the program are extremely flexible and can be adapted depending on the delivery setting and the population that is being served. This program has been validated by published research for multiple formats, emerging adults, youth, high risk youth, military, low-income, and across racial and ethnic backgrounds with various educational levels.

CONTENT: The goals of the PICK program fall into three categories: partner discernment, personal growth, and relationship health. First—participants develop greater partner discernment by learning five key areas to explore in a relationship that are like windows to look through at a prospective partner because of their established validation in published research to be highly predictive of what someone will be like in a committed relationship and ultimately, a life partnership. Second, these same target areas are like mirrors for personal growth, reflecting the maturity, strengths, and weaknesses of each participant. And, finally, participants gain an understanding of relationship health as they learn how to intentionally pace a developing relationship to avoid becoming over-attached and subsequently overlooking key problem areas in a partner. Relationship formation and sustainment are clearly conceptualized with the Relationship Attachment Model® (RAM). This visual tool looks like a sound system mixing board and portrays the ranges of five relational dynamics: the extent someone *knows, trusts, relies on, commits to, and engages in affectionate and/or sexual touch* with another. Participants learn to utilize the RAM as a self-directing assessment of the health of their relationships by profiling the balance and interaction of these five major areas. A simple guideline for safe and secure relationship formation is portrayed by a ‘safe zone sequence’ with the RAM: develop relationships from left to right. The extent of what you know should set the ceiling of what you trust; and your trust needs to determine the degree you rely on another; and finally, the extent of commitment and touch should not exceed the proven levels of what is known, trusted, and relied upon in a relationship. This intentional pacing in building a relationship combined with exploring the five key predictive areas of relationship success decreases personal vulnerabilities and empowers participants with a plan to be more deliberate in their relationships.

FORMAT: The program has several versions and is formatted in either five or ten lesson workbooks. Each session is between 90-150 minutes, so the course easily meets the requirement of 12 hours. However, an advantage of this course is that it is easily adapted to abbreviations or expansions with additional modules. And because the Love Thinks courses for fathers (Home Run Dads) and couples (Couple LINKS) also use the RAM as a conceptual framework, the PICK course can be combined with these courses for a more robust content focus. For instance, fatherhood grantees have combined the PICK course for their single fathers to provide content for healthy relationships and partner selection while also providing Home Run Dads that focuses on the skills and virtues for positive relationships with children and co-parents.

TRAINING AND CERTIFICATION: The PICK course, like other Love Thinks courses, requires a live certification training either in a virtual or in-person setting. The dates of virtual trainings are listed <https://lovethinks.com/virtual-offerings> and typically are two days of 7 hours each day. The Instructor Certification Packet includes the Instructor Manual with lesson plans, sample workbook, and a research summary. It also includes the *How to Avoid Falling in Love with a Jerk* book, a trifold RAM chart used for instruction, and access to an online password-protected platform for PowerPoints, videos, and additional instructor resources.

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

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.

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 PICK 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/OTHER: How To Avoid Falling for a Jerk(ette) has certified instructors in all 50 states, seven countries, thousands of churches, single organizations, educational settings and agencies and by over 3,000 certified Army Chaplains.

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 safely build a healthy attachment and assess the qualities of a dating partner.

In addition, the Ohio State University conducted a research study to evaluate the effectiveness of the program among single Army soldiers. Program participants were evaluated using a retrospective pre-post test design and were compared to non-program participants. The study found that overall, the single soldiers placed more importance on getting to know the key areas that are predictive of what a partner will be like in a future marriage as well as felt more knowledgeable and confident in their abilities to pace and develop a healthy relationship.