

Is Marriage In Our Future?

OBJECTIVES:

1. Assess the quality of one's relationship with his or her child's other parent or current partner.
2. Decide on the future of the relationship with one's co-parent or current partner.

HANDOUTS:

1. *My Relationship History*
2. *Not Everyone Makes a Good Marriage Partner*
3. *Power and Control Wheel*
4. *Equality Wheel*
5. *Focusing On The Person I Want To Marry*
6. *More Focus: Focusing On My Current Partner*
7. *What Are My Choices?*
8. *The Choice I Am Making*
9. *Take Home Message for This Session*

ITEMS NEEDED FOR THIS EDUCATIONAL SESSION:

- Handout materials for participant workbooks
- Scrapbooking materials
- Flipchart and markers
- Pens and pencils

GETTING STARTED

At our last session, we talked about the importance of a healthy marriage for our children. We said that a healthy marriage is one with low conflict. What thoughts did you have about this information since our last session? What steps did you take to improve issues around marriage in your own life?

Getting married is one way many people create a family. Of course, it is not the only way. But I think it is safe to say that most of you at some time in your life will marry. In the last two sessions, we talked in general terms about the importance of a healthy marriage. Today, we are going to focus more on you and improving your chances for a healthy marriage.

ACTIVITY: My Relationship History

To get us thinking about marriage, take a few minutes to complete the handout **My Relationship History**. When we finish discussing the answers you write, you will place the page in your memory book.

The purpose of this exercise is to get you thinking about your future with your child's other parent or your current partner. Your answers may be very personal and you may be reluctant to share them with others. Please find someone to pair up with in the class and share only the information you feel comfortable sharing.

Now please, introduce the person you worked with on this activity. If you are willing, tell the story of how you met your current partner or your child's other parent.

ACTIVITY: Choosing to Marry your Partner

Deciding to get married is one of the most important decisions you can make. It will have a lasting effect on your personal happiness, your health, your children's future and even society.

Not everyone is ready to get married. Experts have identified the kinds of people who are very difficult to live with after marriage. Take a few minutes to consider the different ideas on the handouts **Not Everyone Makes a Good Marriage Partner**. Think about three people you know. Were any of these statements true of him or her? If so, which ones?

As a group discuss these questions:

- Do you know anyone who married someone with these kinds of problems? What happened? What could they have done differently?
- How can you use this information to avoid making mistakes in your own relationship?
- Why is it important for you to carefully think about these problems before you get married? (examples: danger of domestic abuse; higher risk of instability; concerns related to your children and the impact on them of an unhappy marriage/relationship, or of abuse)
- What are positive characteristics you can look for in a partner? Turn around the negative traits in the list and think about their opposite. Please take a few minutes to consider the traits on the **Equality Wheel**. Are all of these traits things you value in a partner? (examples: adaptable and flexible, sensitive to others' needs and feelings; willing to work through problems; emotionally stable; good communication skills; are alike and have similar family backgrounds)

In summary, you need to be very careful about who you choose to marry.

Here are questions to ask yourself:

- Do you believe that your future husband or wife will change if you get married? The facts show that most of us do not change very much or very quickly.
- Do you believe that you will be different when you get married? Do you hope that getting married will give you a fresh start, and you can leave your problems behind?

- Most of us bring “baggage” with us into our marriages. If we had unhappy childhoods or don’t get along well with our parents, we will carry these problems into our marriage.
- Do you struggle with depression, anxiety, anger, being overly sensitive to criticism, or having frequent mood swings? Get help with these problems before getting married. Work on building your relationship with your own parents.
- Are you closing your eyes to your own or your partner’s faults? Most of us tend to not see our partner’s faults before we get married. Then, after we are married we notice every fault.

ACTIVITY: More Focus

Let’s go back to your current partner and assess what you think about him or her. First, with the handout we have provided called **Focusing on My Current Partner**. Take a few minutes to start writing down your thoughts. Do not be concerned about spelling or grammar. Only you will see the answers.

I am going to read some questions that will help you think of words and ideas to write down. Again, there are no right or wrong answers. Write what seems best for you and your children and your future:

- When you think of your baby’s father/mother or current partners, what are the major feelings you have?
- Would you consider marrying this person? Why or why not?
- What do you think marriage to this person would be like?
- What attracted you to him or her to begin with? Do the same things still attract you?
- Has your baby’s father or mother or current partner been a good or bad influence in your life?
- Do you love each other?
- What do you like best about him or her? Least?
- Who puts more into the relationship?
- Do you get along with his/her family and friends?
- How would you change him/her?
- Do you talk enough? Do you listen to each other when you do talk?
- Do you argue too much or not enough?
- Has your baby’s mother/father hurt you or your baby in any major way? If so, was it deliberate? Were his/her intentions good?
- Have you hurt him/her or your baby in any way?
- Does he/she limit you in any way? If so, how?
- What interests and friends do you share?
- How would you describe him/her as a parent? Is he a good father or is she a good mother?
- What would you miss if you stopped seeing each other? What do you miss, if you have already stopped seeing each other?
- What would you be glad about if you broke up? Or, what are you glad about since you broke up?
- How does your relationship compare to the one you’d like to have?
- How do you see your relationship with him/her five years from now? Eighteen years from now?
- Are your present actions taking you there?
- What other concerns do you have about your baby’s father or mother?

Once you finish your lists, circle all the things that are very important to you. You will want to go back to these things later.

Now that you have made two lists, it is time to take a closer look at them.

- First of all, which list is longer?
- Which list had the most things circled?
- Is the list with the things you don't like longer?
- Shorter? Either way, you need to think about your future with this person. In either case, it is important for you to think further about both lists and what they mean to you.
- On each of your lists, put a star by the circled things that you can change. You need to remember that you cannot change everything, especially the other person. It is important that you focus on the things you can control.

You cannot change him or her, but you can change the kind of relationship you have with him or her. Or you can find someone else to fill that role.

ACTIVITY: **What are My Choices**

You will recall that the goal of this class is to help you strengthen your family. One important choice you need to make is the future of your relationship with your baby's mother or father. In addition, if you are no longer involved with your child's other parent, what about your current partner? How involved do you want him/her in your baby's life? Does your future include marriage? How can you work together to raise your baby no matter what kind of relationship you have?

We are now at a key point in making these choices. The handout **What are My Choices?** shows four different paths you can take.

[Explain each path to the group and ask them to think about what each one might mean to them.]

How do you see yourself in each of these paths? Pick the path that seems the most likely one for you at this time. Then, complete the handout **The Choice I Am Thinking of Making**.

ACTIVITY: **Scrapbook And Homework**

Participants will create a page for their workbook that shows the strengths of their choice and the positive impacts it will have on their children.

Give participant the take-home message for this session and have them write down their action steps on the take-home message. Remind them to place the take-home message in the magnetic frame.

CLOSING:

Today we explored a very important topic—evaluating the people that you get romantically involved with and may marry. Are they the best choice for you, for your children, and for your future? Continue to think about your choice until the next session. Try to think of all the pros and cons for this choice.

My Relationship History

How and when did you meet your child's other parent or your current partner?

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What did you like about him or her when you first met? What made you want to spend time with him or her?

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At that time, what did you hope would happen in the relationship?

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What do you hope to have happen in the future with your child's other parent or current partner?

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Not Everyone Makes A Good Marriage Partner

Not everyone makes a good partner in a marriage. The items in the “yellow flag” area are things that should make you think twice before marrying this person. If you find that your potential partner does several of the things in the “yellow flag” area, you probably would want to postpone marriage until these things can be worked out.

YELLOW FLAGS

- If your partner is often very depressed, unsure of himself or herself, and very anxious.
- If either of you ask over and over again, “Are you sure you love me? Do you really care about me?”
- If you spend most of your time together arguing and disagreeing.
- If your partner overreacts to simple problems or situations.
- If you keep thinking, “Things will be better when we get married.”
- If your partner wants to make all the important decisions and you resent it.
- If you are feeling pressure to get married but don’t want to.
- If you spend a day alone with your partner (not watching television), and you find you can’t stand it.
- If your partner does things you cannot stand but you are afraid to tell him or her because he or she will get mad.

Not Everyone Makes A Good Marriage Partner

Items in the “red flag” area mean that you should not marry the person until these things have been resolved. These are things that would put you and your baby at risk for abuse or neglect.



RED FLAGS

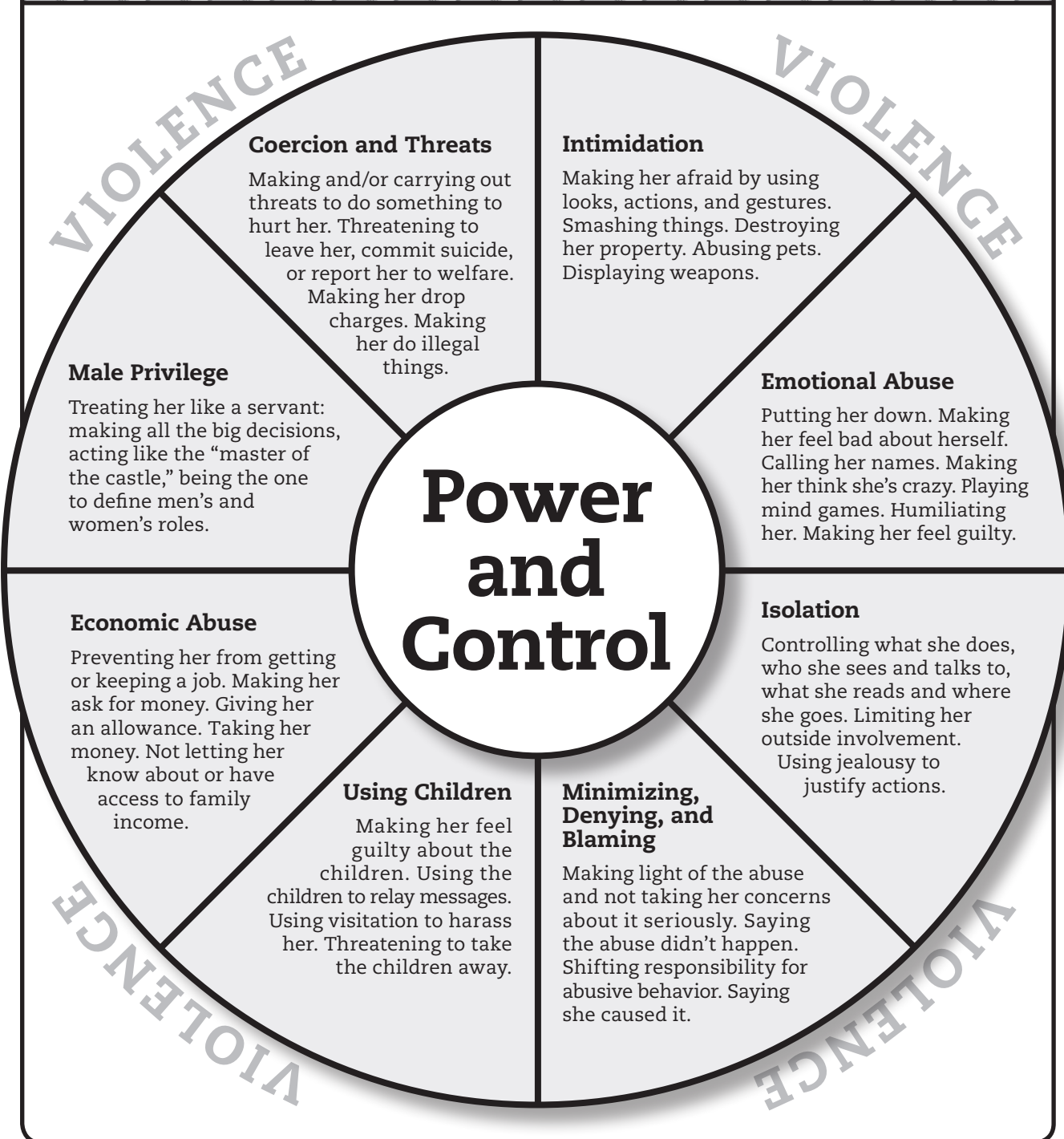


- If your partner is an addict and not in recovery.
- If your partner physically or verbally abuses you or your children.
- If your partner is very controlling and you are fearful of him.
- If your partner demands that you drop all your friends and not see your family.
- If your partner gets angry easily and can't control his or her temper.
- If your partner takes money that is needed to buy food and other necessities.

To help avoid marrying someone with these problems, consider:

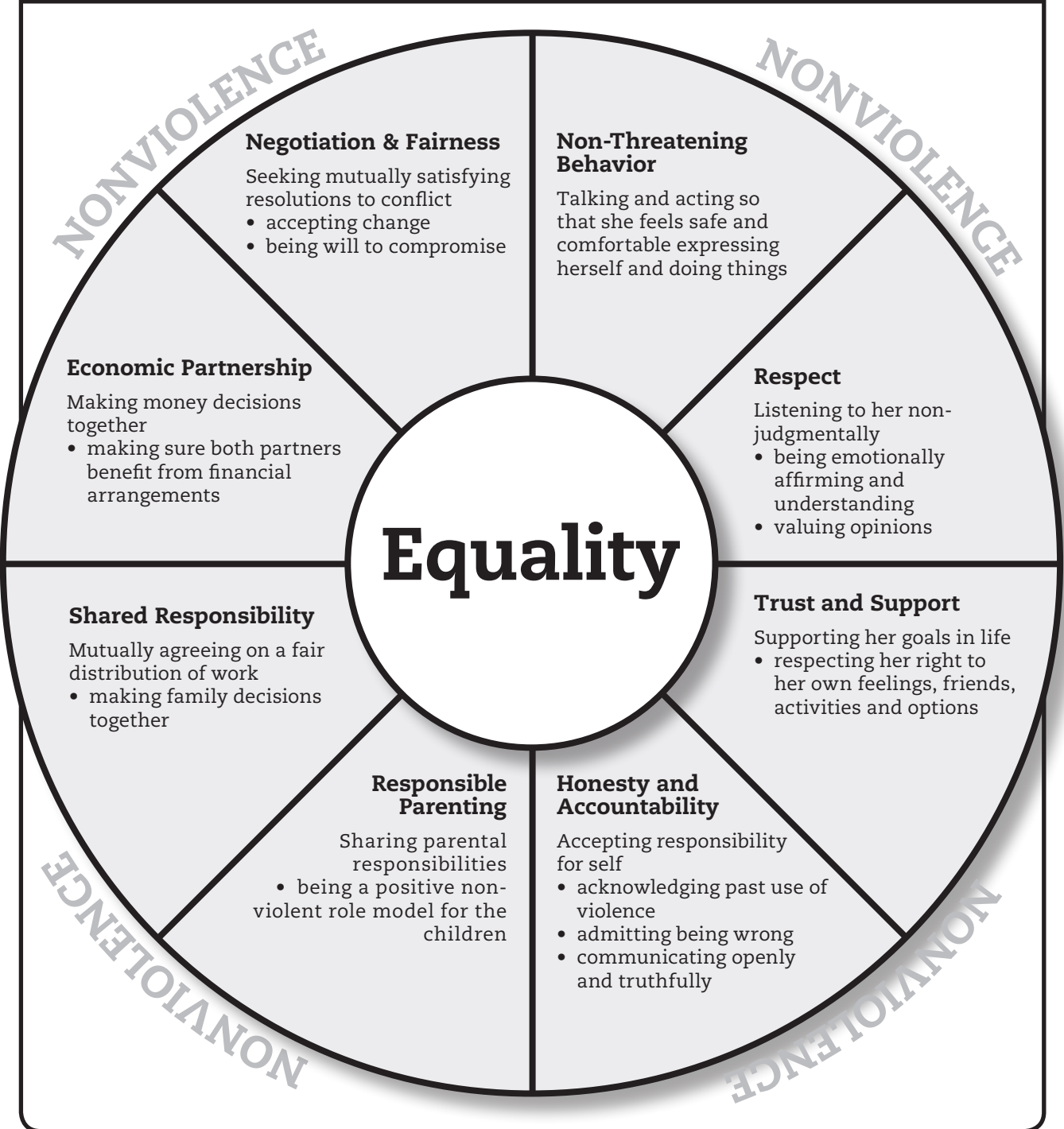
1. Recognizing these problems in yourself or your partner, and getting help. Marriage does not cure personal problems. It only makes them worse.
2. Waiting to get married until you are older or work through these problems.
3. Getting to know your partner better before you get married.

Power And Control Wheel





Equality Wheel



Focusing On The Person I Want To Marry

List words that describe your idea of a perfect marriage partner.

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Think of your current partner. Describe that person as if she or he was a star in a soap opera, other TV show, or movie.

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List words that describe your relationship with your current partner.

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More Focus: Focusing On My Current Partner

Things I LIKE About My Current Partner

Things I DON'T LIKE About My Current Partner

What are My Choices

Marry the Father

Now

Delay

Gain the knowledge and develop the skills necessary for maintaining a good relationship with your partner.

Work together to gain the knowledge and develop skills to be good parents to your child.

Not Marry the Father

Co-Parent

No Involvement

Other

Establish a healthy co-parenting relationship with the father of your child.

Risk factors are too great for father's involvement.

Find other ways to incorporate a male perspective into the child's life.

What is another desired future you wish to have?
Are there other possibilities?

The Choice I Am Making

Please describe the choice you have decided to make:

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What are two Pros for making this choice?

1.
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2.
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What are two Cons against this choice?

1.
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2.
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What other thoughts do you have about this choice?

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Take Home Message for This Session

Directions: Think of one step you will take before the next session and write it down in the space provided. In addition, write down the time, date, and location of the next session.

**Choosing a partner
means making the best
choice for my children,
our future, and me.**

My Action Steps:

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The Next Session:

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DATE
.....
TIME
.....
LOCATION

