

SESSION 8: LOVE, MARRIAGE AND A BABY CARRIAGE

SEQUENCING FOR SUCCESS – INTRODUCTION

In the last session, you learned about parenting as a team. You saw what happens when parents allow conflict in their relationship to affect their child. When parents recognize they share the goal of raising a healthy and happy child, they can learn to communicate and cooperate as a team. In this session, you'll do some thinking about your future and consider where marriage and parenthood fit into your plans.

The title of this session comes from a jingle that children of the 50s and 60s liked to sing while jumping rope. If you've never seen or jumped double dutch, picture this:

Sam and Alicia stand about 10 feet apart from each other, each person holding an end of the rope in their left and right hand. They simultaneously turn the ropes, first left hand, then right hand, in a rhythmic pattern. Sam and Alicia begin singing as Marta prepares to enter the ropes and jump. They sing, "First comes love, then comes marriage, then comes Marta with a baby carriage." At that moment, Marta is supposed to enter the ropes and begin jumping.

OK. It was a kid's song, and many kids never thought much about what they were singing. But think about it now.

The jingle conveys a societal belief about the appropriate sequence of key life events. The belief is that children are better off when their parents love each other and are in a happy healthy marriage before they're born.

We know it doesn't always happen in this order in people's lives.

The next activity will help you think more deeply about the order and sequence you want for important events in your life.

ACTIVITY: Picture Your Future - Influence Your Future

What's your vision of your future? For some of you, this is an easy question. You've thought about it and you have a sense of what you'll do and when you'll do it. Others of you may not have much of a sense about what lies ahead in your life. Some teens don't even believe that they'll make it to age 30.

The truth is you *can* influence what happens in your future. Yes, there are some things that you have no control over, but there are many things you can control. Many decisions you make at this point in your life will affect what happens in your future.

ACTIVITY: Picture Your Future - Influence Your Future *Continued*

Ask yourself these questions:

What do I want to do after high school?

Do I plan to go to college or technical school? If so, what do I plan to study?

What job or career would I like to pursue?

Do I plan to get married? Why or why not? If so, when would be the ideal time to do so?

Do I plan to become a parent? If so, when do I see that happening? How many children would I like to have?

Do I think love and marriage will come before the baby carriage in my life? Why or why not?

ACTIVITY: Picture Your Future - Influence Your Future *Continued*

Do I ever see myself paying (or receiving) child support? Why or why not?

How would becoming a parent in the next year or two affect the plans I have for my future?

Even though you probably can't imagine yourself as a parent now, most people become parents at some point in their lives. It's a very rewarding and joyous experience. We've also learned that it's very expensive and if you have a lot of conflict in co-parenting relationships, it can be harmful for children.

So timing and sequencing is key. Becoming a parent before completing school and having a job can be challenging and make it harder to accomplish your goals and dreams. It's wise to have a plan for your ideal sequence of events. You'll decide what's best for your own life. However, consider this: The sequence that's best for children is when their parents 1) finish school, 2) get a career, 3) enter into a healthy committed relationship such as marriage, and 4) then have children with that partner.

MARRIAGE AND FAMILIES

You just did some thinking about where marriage might fit into your future. In making decisions about marriage, it's important to be informed. In the US, things have shifted some in the last 20-30 years. Fewer people are getting married and the age for getting married has been inching up over the years. For women, the average age for getting married went from 21 in 1970 to 26.5 in 2011. For men, it went from age 23 to 28.7.

However, most people do get married at some point in their lives. And many who don't get married would like to. For example, a recent study of low-income unmarried couples who just had a baby found that the majority of both the men and the women wanted to stay together and get married at some point in the future.

Some of the key benefits of marriage:

- Getting married often makes economic sense. Two can live more cheaply than one. Married people often work harder, earn more and save more.

SESSION 8: Marriage and Families *Continued*

- Once a couple gets married, friends and family members tend to be more willing to offer support and assistance when it's needed.
- Married people get certain legal rights. For example:
 - They can get covered by their spouse's insurance plan.
 - Their spouse can give consent for medical treatments.
 - They have a right to inherit their spouse's property even without a will.
- Marriage often brings: companionship, long-term friendship, increased health and happiness, comfort and care over the long haul.
- Children tend to fare better when their parents are married. Although most children raised by single parents end up doing just fine, children are generally better off when their biological parents are married, live in the same home and have a reasonably healthy marriage. Why? One reason is that married parents tend to earn higher incomes. Having more money reduces stress and makes it easier for parents to spend time with and nurture children. Married parents usually get more support from their extended families and friends. Children tend to have better outcomes, including better educational achievements, better health, lower chances of entering the criminal justice system, and lower chances of being divorced themselves later in life.

Some factors that make getting married more challenging:

- Children from a former relationship (*and having to pay child support if the child doesn't live with you*)
- Unresolved issues of mistrust or infidelity in the relationship
- Pressure to marry because of an unplanned pregnancy
- Limited education and limited job skills
- Addictions to drugs, alcohol or gambling
- High levels of conflict in the relationship
- A problem with anger or violence (*one or both partners*)
- Money issues
- Relatives who don't approve of the marriage

SESSION 8: Marriage and Families *Continued*

Some things to work out before getting married:

Expectations: Discuss answers to the following questions. How will you communicate? How will you solve problems? What would be a “deal breaker” for both of you? What’s your understanding of the commitment you’re making? How will you share household tasks? What are your plans for having children?

Money Management: Discuss your attitudes about money; decide whether to keep your money separate or together; work out a budget, decide how you’ll keep track of and pay bills; make a plan to save; and make a plan to put your affairs in order (insurance, wills, etc.).

Pre-Marital Education or Counseling: There’s so much to talk about and work through before getting married. Most couples either don’t take the time or don’t know how to tackle all of these important topics. Having someone like a counselor or faith leader guide you through this process is so helpful. Occasionally, couples recognize during counseling that they shouldn’t get married! Wouldn’t you rather reach that conclusion before rather than after saying, “I do”? In the year before getting married, the state of Texas strongly encourages couples to attend a pre-marital education class that lasts eight hours. If you complete the course, the state waives the license fee and waiting period.

ACTIVITY: Interview with a Married Couple

You may or may not have many married couples in your life. Think about it for a minute. Who do you know that seems happily married? This doesn’t mean that their marriage is perfect – no marriage is perfect. Think of some people who have a marriage that seems to be working.

Identify a married couple with at least one child to interview. This will be an informal interview. You won’t need to take any notes and you won’t be asked to discuss any specific information in class.

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS:

- How and when did you decide to get married?
- How did you know you’d found the right person?
- What are the keys to making a marriage work?
- What do you think needs to be in place in a marriage before having children?

ACTIVITY: People Whose Parents Have Separated or Divorced

INTERVIEWS with People Whose Parents Have Separated or Divorced

Some people avoid getting married because they fear the marriage won't work and they'll have to divorce. Many people believe the divorce rate is climbing, when it's actually declined since the early 1980s.

Although the divorce rate may not be as high as many people think, it's still quite high and the impact on adults and children is real. It's important for you to be informed about the realities of divorce so you can take that knowledge with you as you make decisions about relationships. Instead of being crippled by fear, you can be equipped to create a healthy marriage and avoid a situation where you feel the only way out is a divorce.

In this assignment, you'll interview two or three people whose parents separated or divorced. As with the interview of a married couple, this will be an informal discussion with people who feel comfortable sharing their personal experiences. You won't need to take any notes. You won't be asked to discuss any specific information in class.

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS:

- How old were you when your parents separated/divorced?
- What was their relationship like before they separated/divorced?
- How did you handle the separation? How did it affect you?
- How do your parents get along now that they're divorced? How does that affect you?
- How has your parents' relationship affected your attitudes about relationships and marriage?