

# CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK ~ WORKING DRAFT

## WORKING GUIDELINES FOR THE NERMEN CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The framework is strength-based, empirically and/or theoretically grounded

Domains reflect processes and elements that build relationship quality

Cognitive, affective, and behavioral elements are infused throughout each domain

Domains can be modified and updated based on appropriate feedback from the process of research and practice

Domains are concrete, succinct, relevant and appropriate to the audience

### CORE DIMENSIONS IN THE CREATION AND MAINTENANCE OF STABLE, HEALTHY COUPLE /MARITAL RELATIONSHIPS

#### **CHOOSE ~ *The central importance of intentionality:***

- Decide to make the relationship a priority
- Set limits on thoughts and behaviors that would harm one's self, the partner, and/or the relationship
- Make a sustained commitment to effort in the relationship.
- Emphasize individual and partner strengths
- Explore what it means to create a healthy relationship
- Envision a healthy future together

#### **KNOW ~ *The development of intimate knowledge of partner:***

- Develop what you know and believe about a partner
- Move from idealized knowledge to intimate knowledge
- Develop attentive awareness and knowledge of partner's life, thoughts and feelings
- Understand partner's pressures and needs
- Remember and value meaningful relationship experiences
- Sincere interest, physical attraction, and emotional closeness
- Self-disclosure and sharing intimate thoughts/feelings with partner
- Share ideas and expectations of a desirable relationship

#### **CARE ~ *Demonstrating kindness, affection, understanding, respect, and caring support:***

- Expressions of fondness/affection, appreciation and positive thoughts
- Intentional expressions of kindness and support
- Perspective taking and empathy for partner's view
- Tolerance and making allowances for continuing differences
- Cultivate positive feelings toward partner and relationship
- Soothing troubled or negative feelings
- Being respectful in accepting and valuing differences
- Openness of heart to partner needs and interests
- Being present and accessible to partner
- Listening and turning towards partner in times of challenge or frustration

#### **CARE FOR SELF ~ *Maintaining physical, psychological, and sexual health and wellness as an individual:***

- Develop skills for maintaining physical wellness (e.g., eating, sleep, physical fitness, substance abuse, and individual sexuality)
- Develop effective stress management skills for chronic and acute stressors
- Develop skills for identifying and managing threats to psychological (emotional and mental) well-being

#### **SHARE ~ *Developing and maintaining friendship and sense of "we"; spending meaningful time together:***

- Find and cultivate common interests and activities
- Develop reciprocal exchanges of affection and love with partner
- Spend time together that builds intimacy
- Participate in couple rituals that build the relationship
- Protect the relationship from negative outside influences
- Cultivate a mental awareness, appreciation, and optimistic view of the relationship
- Design rituals/traditions that add meaning to the couple relationship
- Engage yourselves in a common purpose

#### **MANAGE ~ *Strategies of engagement and interaction around differences, stresses, and issues of safety:***

- Manage differences that occur in values, beliefs, expectations,
- Utilize perspective taking and empathy for partner's view
- Develop a positive emotional climate that is supportive and caring
- Use constructive engagement and interaction strategies
- Manage the stress response during conflicts.
- Maintain positivity (more positives vs. negatives) and avoid expression of negative communication patterns (defensiveness, contempt, criticism, withdrawal, etc.)
- Use positive interpretations, judgments, assumptions, and attributions
- Use soothing and supportive behaviors
- Use team-oriented decision-making strategies
- Adopt a willingness to accept influence
- Use forgiveness skills; welcome repair attempts
- Maintain emotional and physical safety

#### **CONNECT ~ *Engaging social support, community ties, and sources of meaning:***

- Draw upon support from a social network
- Cultivate relationships with extended family members
- Participate in a community supportive of your relationship
- Connect to sources of meaning (i.e., spirituality, values)
- Engage jointly in extra-familial organizations and systems
- Identify what is noble outside of the couple and celebrate it
- Identify and invest yourselves in service together
- Offer support/service to others, including external family members