

## NATIONAL EXTENSION RELATIONSHIP AND MARRIAGE EDUCATION NETWORK (NERMEN)

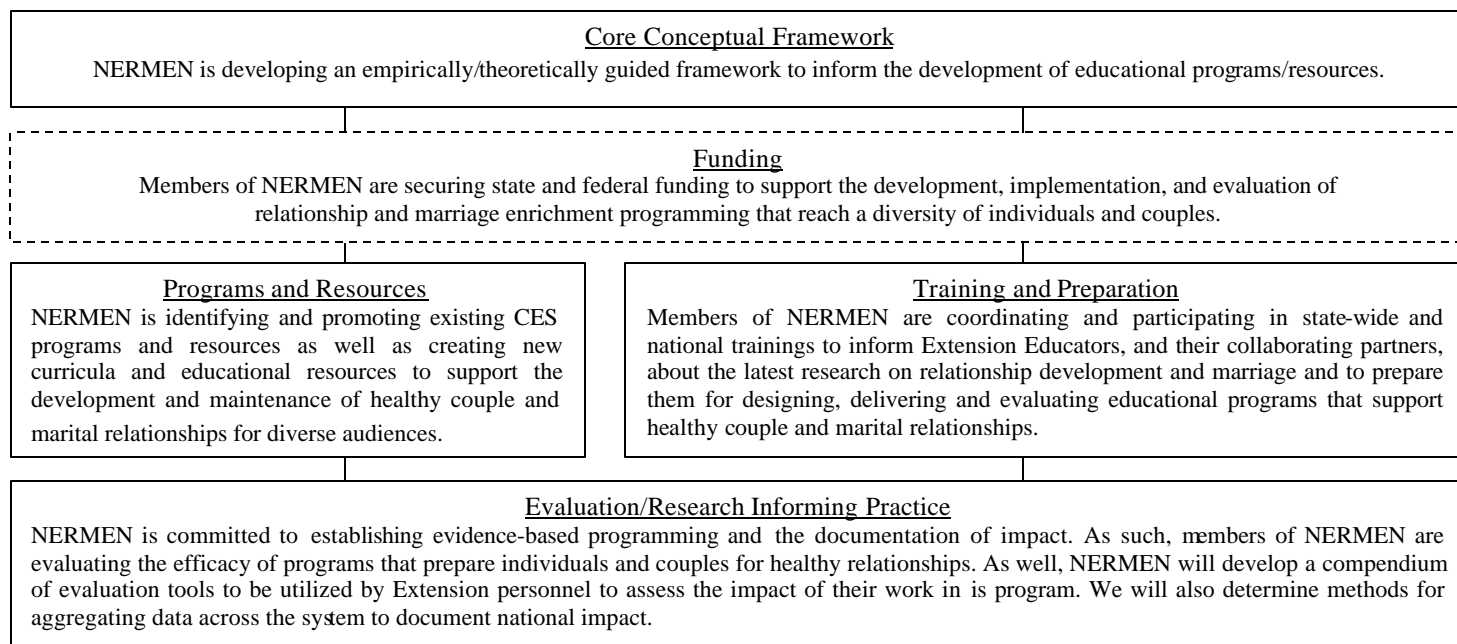
**Vision:** A nation-wide outreach through Extension Specialists and Educators in partnership with agencies and organizations at the national, state, and community levels that supports individuals and couples preparing for, developing and enriching healthy relationships and healthy marriages.

**Mission:** To provide research-based resources and promote partnerships to advance the knowledge and practice of relationship and marriage education.

### Guiding Principles:

- We use theory and research to guide our selection and development of resources
- We provide educational programs that are based on solid research and tested for effectiveness. Recognizing that not all programs/resources have been tested, we also participate in and assist partners/collaborators in evaluating program effectiveness.
- We strive to develop and use materials, resources, and approaches that are appropriately responsive to cultural diversity.
- We develop/use developmentally appropriate materials, resources, and approaches.
- We use and advocate a “do no harm” approach; such that safety in relationships is a priority.
- We are inclusive in our outreach of programs to individuals and couples, married and non-married.
- We acknowledge that a variety of family forms can provide healthy environments for children.
- Programmatic goals focus on building individual, couple, and family strengths.

### Current Activities:



### Collaborators

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**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 AND 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 interest, affection, and closeness:***

- 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
- Remember and value meaningful relationship experiences
- Sincere interest, physical attraction, and emotional closeness
- Continuing appreciation and positive thoughts towards partner
- Self-disclosure and sharing intimate thoughts/feelings with partner
- Expressions of fondness/affection, appreciation and positive thoughts
- Share ideas and expectations of a desirable relationship

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

- Perspective taking and empathy for partner's view
- Reframing
- Understanding partner's pressures and needs
- Tolerance and making allowances for continuing differences
- Being respectful in accepting and valuing differences
- Openness of heart to partner needs and interests
- Intentional expressions of kindness and support
- Partner presence and accessibility
- Listening and turning towards each other
- Care during times of challenge or frustration

**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
- Design rituals/traditions that add meaning to the couple relationship
- Engage yourselves in a common purpose

**SHARE ~ *Developing and maintaining friendship, positive interactions, and meaningful time together:***

- Perspective taking and empathy for partner's view
- Willingness to accept influence
- Welcoming repair attempts
- Avoid and minimize negative attributions or judgments
- Cultivate a mental awareness, appreciation, and optimistic view of the relationship
- Cultivate positive feelings toward partner and relationship
- Soothing troubled or negative feelings
- Maintain positivity (more positives vs. negatives) and avoid expression of negative communication patterns (defensiveness, contempt, criticism, withdrawal, etc.)
- 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

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

- Manage differences that occur in values, beliefs, expectations, etc.
- Develop a positive emotional climate that is supportive and caring
- Use constructive engagement and interaction strategies
- Use positive interpretations, assumptions, and attributions
- Use soothing and supportive behaviors
- Use team-oriented decision-making strategies
- Use forgiveness skills
- Maintain emotional and physical safety

**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

*Note: The following is a **working draft** created at a National Extension Relationship and Marriage Education Network team retreat held at the University of Illinois September 15-16, 2005. Please send comments/suggestions to Sean Brotherson (sbrother@ndsuxext.nodak.edu), Family Life Specialist at North Dakota State University Extension*