

Offering Relationship and Marriage Education (RME) in your Community

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Objectives

- Understand principles and strategies for designing RME programs
- Recognize skills and knowledge needed for working in a community setting

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Sally

- Works as a community-based educator with many years of experience
- Began her career as a Family and Consumer Sciences teacher
- Offers programs on child care training, helping children cope with divorce, nutrition, and money management
- Well respected and known in her community

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Sally Recently Learned About

- A new *Any State Marriage Initiative*
- Launched by the state's governor
- Training community-based practitioners to offer marriage education

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Sally is debating what to do.

Sally is interested:

- Has some background in the subject matter
- Would like to prevent divorces
- Knows the training would improve her skills

Sally is also anxious:

- Been a long time since she taught this subject matter
- Uncertain about how to recruit an audience for the community trainings

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Sally has questions.

- Who will she partner with in the community?
- Is this a need in her community?
- How will she handle conflicts between couples during sessions?
- What if same sex couples want to attend?

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You may be a lot like Sally.

- Interested in offering relationship and marriage education
- Unsure of how to recruitment and work with others in this area
- Afraid of getting into controversial areas

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This session will address:

1. What do you need to know to plan RME that leads to positive outcomes?
2. How do you work with others in the community to offer RME?
3. What are the different elements you need to consider when planning RME?

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Three Parts

1. Professional competencies for delivering RME
2. Planning RME as a social activity that uses reciprocity and negotiation
3. A framework for offering RME

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Part I: Professional Requirements for Delivering RME

- The technical skills and knowledge
- An ethical vision for RME
- The political skills and knowledge

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Technical Skills & Knowledge

- Relevant stakeholders involved in the planning
- Needs assessment/problem analysis/family strengths
- Program design
- Program implementation and delivery
- Evaluation of both the program implementation and program impacts
- Program improvement and re-implementation

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What is your ethical vision for RME?

- What do you see as the purpose of relationship and marriage education for the families in your community?
- What do you hope to gain?
- What outcomes or impact do you hope to see?
- Will the participants you hope to recruit share this same purpose?

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Other Ethical Considerations

- What do you think is the best way to go about program planning?
- What do you believe about adult learners?
- How do you believe people learn?

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Political Skills & Knowledge

- Working with others
- Developing trust
- Locating opposition and support

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Other political considerations

- Being sensitive to timing
- Knowing the informal 'ropes' as well as the formal community structures

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How do I work
with others in the
community to offer RME?

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Examine Your Assumptions:

- about RME
- community's readiness for RME
- people having a vested interest in RME

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Analyze what is going
on in the community
and the larger
environment.

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Awareness of Relevant External Factors

- Know the issues important to your community.
- Know how and when to respond to differing assumptions.

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Part II: The Importance of Reciprocity and Negotiation

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Skills of Reciprocity & Negotiation

1. Ask ethically insightful questions:
 - Whose interests are to be represented?
 - How will these persons be represented?
 - When should they be involved?
2. Recognize relations of power.
3. Be willing to listen.

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More on Asking Ethically Insightful Questions

- What is the issue being addressed?
- Who is being asked to answer?
- Does the question—
 - Create motion?
 - Create options?
 - Avoid asking “why”?
 - Empower the person being asked?
 - Address taboo issues?
 - Have a clear and easily understood focus?

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Ground Rules for Messy Conversations

- Acknowledge each other as equals.
- Try to stay curious about and open to each other's ideas.
- Recognize you need each other's help to become better listeners.
- Slow down to give time to reflect and think.
- Remember that conversation is the natural way humans think together.
- Expect the conversation to be messy at times (Wheatley, 2002).

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Part III: What are the different elements that you need to consider when planning?

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Urban Institute Study

- Studied service delivery and evaluation designs for healthy marriage programs
- Developed a framework to guide their study methods
- Adapted the framework to become a list of questions to guide your planning efforts

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Four key aspects of the framework

- Environment
- Setting
- Educational program
- Clients or participants

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Environment – Funding

- Planning does not occur in isolation.
- Environment influences the development, implementation and evaluation of programs.
- First aspect deals with funding:
 - Mixed sources
 - Client fees
 - Public funding

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Environment – Healthy Marriage Initiatives

- Local, state and federal levels
- Need to decide the level of participation your program will have in these initiatives
- Discuss these issues with your partners

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Environment – Existing RME Programs in the Community

- Identify programs that already exist in your community
- Decide whether or not to invite providers to be involved in your effort if they are not

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Setting for Relationship and Marriage Education

- Four elements: organizational structure, collaboration, staffing and range of services
- Organizational structure:
 - Will the program be free standing or part of a menu of programs?
 - Will the program be a joint effort with another organization?

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Setting -- Collaboration

- How formally will you collaborate with others?
 - Informal arrangements
 - Formal arrangements with letters of agreement

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Setting – Staffing

- What kind of credentials, background and training do you want for facilitators?
- Who you decide to use will determine training and supervision needs

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Setting – Range of Services

- Level of services offered
 - Offer only an educational program
 - Serve audiences with needs for additional service that lead to a healthy marriage

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Program Participants – the Population Served

- Who will you serve or reach?
- Three areas: the population served, attendance issues; and the target stage of the participants.
- For the population served:
 - The income level
 - Race or ethnicity
- Caring for my Family curriculum

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Program Participants – Attendance Issues

- How many people do you hope to reach?
- What barriers to participation might your target audience encounter?
 - Location
 - Child care
- How will you recruit the target audience?

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Program Participants – Targeting your Audience

- RME is not a one-size-fits-all program.
- Program content will depend on participants' life span stage:
 - Premarital, First baby, In crisis, Raising children, Empty nesters
- Try to keep similar participants together in a group.

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Educational Program

- Any face-to-face interaction that occurs with the target audience
- Use of the term “intervention”
 - Health care professionals and prevention specialists
 - May offer more than RME education including other human services

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Educational Program – Curriculum

- Four elements of educational programs:
 - Curriculum, Dosage, Format, Approach
- Curriculum:
 - Already developed
 - Put together different pieces of curricula
 - Develop your own
- Be sure to test for cultural and language appropriateness

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Educational Program – Dosage

- Length of the sessions and number of sessions in the program
- Know that more sessions tend to improve learning and retention
- Need to balance with the time demands of potential participants

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Educational Program -- Format

- How the educational program will be implemented
- Three basic approaches:
 - Work with one person or couple at a time
 - Offer group educational sessions
 - Use support groups

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Educational Program – Approach

- Three elements of approach
 - Reasons for the program – strengthening the couple relationship, building human capital or meeting basic needs
 - Focus of the program on couple, child or family
 - Orientation to skill building or therapy

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Using the Planning Guide for RME Programs

- Work with others
- Include your target audience in planning activities
- Retain your ethical vision

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Conclusion

- Offering relationship and marriage education requires extensive planning and preparation.
- Knowing your community and how to work with community partners is essential in successful program planning and delivery.
- Having an array of professional skills will assist you in being comfortable and having positive outcomes in providing leadership to relationship and marriage education in your community.

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