

Lay the Foundation

*Intentionally committing effort to lay the foundation
for a lasting relationship*



Objectives

- Understand that healthy relationships require sustained effort over time.
- Identify choices and strategies that lay a strong foundation for a safe, stable, and satisfying relationship.
- Aspire to engage in behaviors that reinforce dedication and commitment to maintaining a healthy relationship.

Background Reading for Facilitator

- NERMEN Chapter – *Choose: Making Intentional Relationship Choices*

Facilitator Materials

- One blindfold (bandanas) per couple
- Flip chart or writing board and marker
- Participant workbook materials (1 tip sheet; 5 worksheets)
- Relationship Wheel

Participant Workbook

- Tip Sheet: *Putting Effort Into Your Relationship* – p. 19-20
- Worksheet: *Do You Avoid Hurtful Thoughts and Behaviors* – p. 21
- Worksheet: *Ways to Show Commitment* – p. 22
- Worksheet: *Focus on Strengths* – p. 23
- Worksheet: *Envision a Healthy Future Together* – p. 24
- Worksheet: *My Action Plan* – p. 1

Session Overview at a Glance

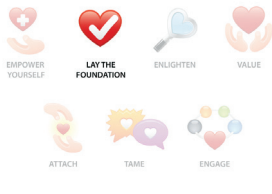
- Laying the foundation – Introduction (Slides 1-4)
- Make the relationship a priority (Slides 5 & 6)
- Putting the relationship first (Slides 7-11)
- Summary and action plan (Slides 12-14)

60-90 Minutes

20-27 Minutes
10-15 Minutes
25-40 Minutes
5-8 Minutes

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LAY THE FOUNDATION



KEY POINT

Introduce importance of trust and commitment to establish a strong foundation for healthy relationships.



SPECIAL NOTE

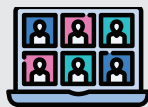
For activity, make sure to set the room with a few obstacles to navigate around, over or under.



If a participant's partner is not present or is unable to move around the room, one of the facilitators can fill in.

If conducting the program as a weekly series, consider having participants take another pulse check after completing the activity to see if their heart rate elevated or remained consistent with past pulse checks.

VIRTUAL ADAPTATION



Fingertips – See p.107 in *Adaptations for Virtual Delivery* guide.

In many ways, building a strong relationship with each other is like building a house. It starts with laying a strong foundation. In healthy relationships, that foundation consists of trust and commitment. These are two distinct and important key elements of healthy relationships. To help us start thinking about trust and commitment, let's do a quick activity.

Activity (*Fingertips, from Together We Can*)

- Give each couple a blindfold and ask one partner to wear the blindfold.
- Instruct couples to stand facing their partner and touch all 10 fingertips together.
- Have the person without the blindfold lead the blindfolded partner around the room without running into others or objects, while they continue touching all 10 fingertips. It is ok for the partners to talk to each other.
- After a few minutes ask the partners to exchange roles and lead the blindfolded partner around the room again.

Ask:

- When you were blind folded and being led around the room, what were you thinking? Feeling?
- When you were not blindfolded and leading your partner, what were you thinking? Feeling?
- Were you able to continue touching and stay connected when you ran into objects? Were you able to keep touching each other's fingers? Or did you have to stop and get re-connected?
- Was it easier to do this activity after you switched roles? Why or why not?

[If none of the responses to the questions above reference back to the heart-brain connection material from the introduction or empower module, follow-up with probing questions related to heart-rate, stress-level, influence of touch, and ability to process and communicate information clearly.]

In addition to reinforcing how stress, touch, and our emotions influence how we process and communicate information, this activity was a fun way to get us thinking about trust and commitment, and the effort involved in maintaining it in our relationships. Trust can be easily broken by a variety of unseen or unexpected events in our lives. In many cases, we can reconnect to each other through getting our bearings and intentionally coming back together. This takes much thought and effort.

Ask: Have any of you ever heard of or been on a float trip?

When people go on a float trip they have some choices to make before getting on the raft. For example, what are some of things you would want or need to take? *[Examples: life jacket, food, water, emergency supplies, rope, other gear depending on length of trip, a way to get back. If no one mentions PADDLES, be sure to point this out.]*

Ask:

- Why are paddles important? *[Examples: They help steer the raft, avoid rocks or rapids.]*
- What potential obstacles or dangers might the couple in this picture experience if they lost or forgot their paddles? *[Examples: hitting rocks, rapids, waterfalls, not being able to get to where you wanted to go.]*

Much like the couple in this raft, not being equipped with the right tools can lead your relationship to disaster. **[Advance to Slide 3]** You have to *decide* on what you need to do for your relationship, and make some effort or your relationship will *slide* to an untimely end. But having the right tools is not enough. Bill Doherty, a relationship researcher, wrote this about rivers and relationships in his book, *Take Back your Marriage...*

[Advance to Slide 4; Facilitator, read quote aloud]

From time-to-time, we forget to “paddle” and slide into choices we sometimes regret. Remember, too, that with focused effort – you can always “course correct” and get back on a better path.

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Preparing for the Journey



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What equipment is necessary when going on a rafting trip?

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Letting Your Relationship Slide?



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Launching a raft into a river...



4

Natural currents will try to take you downstream. It doesn't matter how much you care about each other, no matter how full of hope and promise and good intentions, if you stay on the raft without a good deal of paddling - infrequent or sporadic paddling is not enough - you will end up somewhere down river.

In human relations, "paddling" is like the attention and energy devoted to our relationships.

Adapted from: Doherty, W. (2011). Take back your marriage. New York: Guilford Press.

KEY POINT



Introduce the importance of being intentional and purposeful in a relationship.

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Make Your Relationship a Priority



- ✓ Be aware of your choices, decisions, and actions.
- ✓ Be intentional in doing things that strengthen your relationship
- ✓ Choice is important to all other parts of a healthy relationship.

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Make Your Relationship a Priority



If couples are not continually doing things to hold on to each other, they will naturally drift apart.

☐ MINE
☐ YOURS
☒ OURS

KEY POINT

Reinforce the importance of intentionality in maintaining trust and commitment in the relationship.



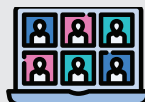
WORKBOOK

Do You Avoid Hurtful Thoughts and Behaviors? p. 21.

Objective: identify thoughts and behaviors that can help or harm their relationship.



VIRTUAL ADAPTATION



Ask for Examples – See p.107 in *Adaptations for Virtual Delivery* guide.

Thus, maintaining a healthy relationship requires being intentional, committed, and purposeful. Like our raft analogy, by paddling with intent, each partner is choosing to make the relationship a priority. We choose to feel, think and act in ways that support our partner and the relationship.

Ask: What are some examples of feelings, thoughts, and actions that can support a relationship?

[Write these ideas down on a flip chart or writing board under three columns: Feelings, Thoughts, Actions. If people are not willing to share, you can use a technique like throwing a ball from person to person. When they get the ball they need to give one idea or say “pass.” After a few minutes, ask the group to review the list and add other items they think should be on the list.]

This is a great list. We should be sure that we have “coming to this class” listed since you all have made that important effort and are clearly showing how intentional you are about your relationship. Now let’s take a moment to allow you and your partner to process how you each do these things. At the same time, let’s consider thoughts, feelings and actions that can weaken that trust and commitment and hurt your relationship.

Activity (Avoiding Hurtful Thoughts and Behaviors)

- Provide participants about two minutes to fill out their own worksheet on **page 21**. Let them know it is ok to add additional examples based on what the group came up with and listed on the flipchart.
- When done, ask participants to discuss their responses with their partner (or reflect individually if there is no partner present).
- Encourage participants to discuss ways they could do more things to help their relationship.

[Advance to Slide 6] Choosing to strengthen the relationship involves continually doing these things to hold on to each other. If we don’t do anything in our relationships, we naturally drift or slide apart. Thus, we must be intentional in putting forth an effort to do things that show our partner that we are committed to the relationship. And, remember, as we discussed before, all of this relies on being able to stay calm physiologically.

PUTTING THE RELATIONSHIP FIRST

2-3 MINUTES

So, what are some ways we can show that our relationship comes first? Let's talk about four things couples can do to strengthen the foundation of their relationship:

- Do not let other interests come between you.
- Work on building the relationship.
- Focus on each other's strengths.
- Envision a healthy future together.

[Try to connect these four points to the examples shared earlier on **Slide 5** that were recorded on the flipchart/board.]

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Put Your Relationship First



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- ✓ Do not let other interests come between you
- ✓ Work on building the relationship
- ✓ Focus on each other's strengths
- ✓ Envision a healthy future together

KEY POINT

Introduce the four ways that couples can demonstrate that their relationship comes first.



DO NOT LET OTHER INTERESTS INTERFERE

5-7 MINUTES

As we discussed earlier, there are feelings, thoughts and actions that can help the relationship as well as hurt the relationship. Sometimes, there are other things and other people that also interfere in your relationship. Later we will discuss ways that others can help our relationship [see *Engage*], but for now, let's focus on those other interests and persons that could hurt the relationship.

Ask: What are some examples of obstacles, persons, or life experiences that could interfere with your ability to make the relationship a priority?

[Examples: work, financial struggles, children, television, internet, friends, housework, etc.]

As you can see, there are a lot of things that can get in our way of making the relationship work. That is why we have to be mindful of these things and intentional in our efforts to balance these other needs and persons in our lives with the needs of our partner and the relationship. For each of the "don'ts" can you think of an important "do"?

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Put Your Relationship First



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What are some examples of obstacles, people, or life experiences that could interfere with your ability to make your relationship a priority?

KEY POINT

A variety of obstacles and challenges can interfere with one's ability to put the relationship first.



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Put Your Relationship First



What are some ways that you can show commitment to your relationship?

KEY POINT

Commitment can be shown in a variety of ways. All these feelings, thoughts and actions require continuous effort.



WORKBOOK

Ways to Show

Commitment, p. 22.

Objective: identify ways to demonstrate their commitment to each other and the relationship.



As you can see, relationships require continuous effort – even after *many* years together, couples still have to paddle to continue in the right direction. And, as we just discussed, some circumstances may require even more intentional effort by both partners.

It takes more than loving feelings to have a healthy and lasting relationship, it also requires commitment. But, what does commitment look like? Sure, we may wear a ring (or other symbols) to show our partner (and others) that we are committed. But, like we discussed earlier [*refer to list on flip chart/board*] it is the things we do on a daily basis for our partner and the relationship – *our actions* – that demonstrate that commitment. Also, partners sometimes have different opinions about what they consider “good” or “okay” actions that reflect commitment.

Let’s take a moment now to explore more ways that we can show our commitment to our partner and the relationship.

Activity (*Ways to Show Commitment*)

- Provide participants about two minutes to fill out their own worksheet on **page 22**.
- When done, ask participants to discuss their responses with their partner (or reflect individually if there is no partner present).
- Challenge participants to be specific in identifying how they would like to improve their expressions of commitment by sharing clear examples.
- Remind participants to focus only on what they individually do and can do.

Ask: What are some things your partner does well?

[Note, you may want to remind participants of the ground rules, and caution them from making comparisons between what others share with what they and their partner do. Every couple shows commitment in different ways. Reflect on the positive, and be open to new ideas.]

In addition to actions, the thoughts and feelings we hold on to can reinforce our commitment to each other. When you began your relationship, there were likely many qualities that you admired about your partner that attracted you to each other. There also were likely things you did for each other and together that you valued and appreciated. Over time, these experiences brought you closer together, which is why you made a commitment to be together. When we hit rough patches and hard times in our relationships, it can be helpful to remember those good times, so we can be reminded why we came together. By remembering and focusing on the strengths of our partner and the relationship, we find common ground to work from together and push through the hard times.

In contrast, when we focus on what bothers us, we get stuck dwelling on tense and angry feelings, which often makes us more tense and angry. *[Remind participants of the studies shared in the introduction showing the connection between frustrated and appreciated heart rates to actions as well as between caring versus angry memories to health.]*

If we want more trust and commitment in a relationship, it is better to intentionally focus on what each partner has done that *has* worked and focus on the good in the relationship.

Earlier, you spent some time discussing each other's signature strengths *[refer back to My (and My Partner's) Strengths worksheet, page 17]*.

For practice this week, I would like for you to build on this and fill out the "Focus on Strengths" worksheet on **page 23**. Take some time to remember those good times, the things that you have done for each other that you value. Refer back to your responses regularly (e.g., special holidays, annual or half-year anniversaries, birthdays), and take time to think about new, positive experiences that you have shared together.

[If you have at least five minutes (e.g., you are delivering the 90-minute version of the module), have couples complete the "Focus on Strengths" worksheet on page 23 in class. First, provide participants about two to three minutes to fill out their own worksheet on page 23. When done, ask participants to use the remaining time to discuss their responses with their partner (or reflect individually if there is no partner present). Close this activity by asking couples "how did this make you feel?"]

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Identify Signature Strengths



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- ✓ What are your signature strengths?
- ✓ What are your partners strengths?



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KEY POINT



Focusing on the positive qualities of our partner and the relationship helps maintain common ground to work from together.

WORKBOOK



Focus on Strengths,
p. 23.

Objective: become aware of and value focusing on each other's strengths.

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Set Goals With Your Partner

**KEY POINT**

Envisioning a healthy future together involves working towards shared goals together.

**WORKBOOK****Envision a Healthy Future Together, p. 24.**

Objective: identify relationship goals and reflect on ways to reach goals together with their partner.



Another way we can put the relationship first is to envision a healthy future together. One way to do this is to work towards goals that support the relationship. Goals give us a sense of purpose, something to aim for. Reaching our goals gives us a sense of accomplishment. Many people have personal goals for things like eating healthy or being active, trying something new, or saving money for something they want to buy.

Although we set personal goals, many people enter relationships without really thinking about what they want out of it. Fewer take the time to talk with their partner about their goals. When couples take time to talk about goals, it shows commitment to the relationship. Having regular conversations about values and goals can also increase a couple's emotional bond. What are some goals you have for your relationship?

Activity (*Envision a Healthy Future Together*)

- Provide participants about two minutes to fill out their own worksheet on **page 24**.
- Explain the difference between short- and long-term goals. Some of the goals can be related to actions they want to improve on to show commitment or care for self-practices discussed earlier.
- When done, ask participants to share their goals with their partner (or reflect individually if there is no partner present). Ask them to take turns sharing one goal at a time.
- After sharing their goals, encourage couples to talk about common goals and how they can work together to achieve those goals.

As you shared your goals, I hope there were some goals you each had that you shared a common interest in. For goals that were different, take time after today to think about possible ways you can support each other in reaching those goals. Later in the program we will explore ways to manage our differences.

Ask: How would you complete this quote? "In marriage, the grass grows greener..."

[After a few suggestions, **advance to Slide 13** to show next line of quote.]

So far, we have reviewed several ways you can "water" and nurture your relationship. And throughout the program we will explore more. But, it starts by laying a strong foundation based on trust and commitment.

[**Advance to Slide 14**] Commitment is more than a symbol we wear or words we say, it is demonstrated through our thoughts and actions.

Ask: Based on what we have discussed, what are some ways you currently show commitment?

Pull out your **Relationship Wheel** [or refer to **page 7** in the workbook if you do not have wheels], to remember to practice the following things on a regular basis to maintain that commitment to your partner and the relationship:

- Am I making conscious decisions about what is best for my relationship, or am I sliding?
- Do I commit effort to the relationship?
- Do I focus on my partner's strengths and the positive experiences we share together?
- Do I do and say things that help my relationship and intentionally avoid hurtful thoughts and actions?
- Do I look for ways to grow our relationship?
- Do I share my goals with my partner and work with my partner towards a healthy future together?

Ask: Now, what is one *new* thing you plan to do in order to lay a stronger foundation for your relationship?

Take a moment and write that down in your workbook on **page 1**. Then, share that with your partner.

[As participants complete their action plan, review the flip chart listing the participants' expectations (from Introduction). Check-off each topic that was addressed.]



KEY POINT

Healthy relationships and marriages require work and a commitment to be intentional and deliberate in our efforts to sustain the relationship.



WORKBOOK

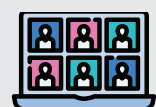
My Action Plan, p. 1.

Objective: encourage participants to document at least two new things (per module) they will try to do.



VIRTUAL ADAPTATION

Action Plan – See p.108 in *Adaptations for Virtual Delivery* guide.



NOTES

[illegible]