

Facilitator Implementation Guide



ELEVATE is a couple's education curriculum that blends practical skills with an understanding of the physiology of human interaction (the heart-brain-behavior connection) to enhance individuals' and couples' healthy relationship knowledge and skills. The central core content and the framework for ELEVATE are based on the **National Extension Relationship and Marriage Education Model**, or NERMEN. NERMEN was developed by the National Extension Relationship and Marriage Education Network (www.nermen.org) working group and derived from the extant literature on predictors of marital quality.

This Facilitator Implementation Guide has been written as a companion document to the ELEVATE facilitator manual. In this guide, you will find the following:

- **How to Navigate the Curriculum**
- **Working with the Presentation Slides and Videos**
- **Recommendations for Delivering ELEVATE**

The ELEVATE curriculum includes eight modules: an introduction and seven lessons that review the core principles and skills outlined in the NERMEN. Two distinct characteristics of the ELEVATE curriculum are: (1) the practical strategies and tools taught and (2) the inclusion of mindfulness practice activities that can help couples regulate their heart-brain response to stressful triggers. Furthermore, participants monitor their pulse rates throughout the program so that they can see how their bodies respond to stress and the benefits of practicing mindfulness.

ELEVATE can benefit all couples regardless of their cultural background, sexual orientation or relationship status, i.e., dating, cohabiting, engaged, married. And, while ELEVATE was developed as a couples program, individuals in a couple relationship can attend without their partner. While these individuals will be somewhat disadvantaged during some of the couple activities designed for both partners, they will also gain valuable information that they can later share with their partner. For more information about engaging couples, be sure to review the **Recommendations for Delivering ELEVATE** section in this guide.



Learn more about the heart-brain connection and mindfulness. Read *Physiology of Love* and *Helping Couples Practice Mindfulness* – both are included in the ELEVATE Facilitator Manual.

Stay Connected! We would love your feedback. Please share how you have used ELEVATE and any feedback regarding content, implementation, and facilitation recommendations. Contact Dr. Francesca Adler Baeder (francesca@auburn.edu) and Dr. Ted Futris (tfutris@uga.edu).

For new and/or updated ELEVATE resources, visit www.nermen.org/ELEVATE.php.

HOW TO NAVIGATE THE CURRICULUM

ELEVATE is a hands-on program that engages couples in the learning process. The Facilitator Manual is designed to help educators understand important principles they are teaching, reinforce critical skills that foster healthy couple relationships, and engage couples in discussing and practicing these skills. Each module in the Facilitator Manual includes the following: a module overview, scripted lesson with presentation slide images, and facilitator notes and tips regarding activities, videos, engagement questions, and workbook materials.

Module Overview

A one-page overview is included at the beginning of each ELEVATE module and includes the following information:

- **Objectives.** These objectives outline the focus of each module – where the session should start and where it should end. Be mindful of these objectives as you guide participants through each lesson, particularly if you go “off script.”
- **Background reading for facilitator.** To help educators familiarize themselves with the core principles and skills addressed in each module, every lesson includes a chapter from the *National Extension Relationship and Marriage Education Model: Linking Research to Relationship and Marriage Education* as initial background reading. The publication is available at www.nermen.org/NERMEM.php. It is also recommended that facilitators further research the topics discussed, as needed, to fully understand and feel comfortable with the principles and skills being taught and questions that may arise.
- **Facilitator materials.** Each module includes activities that require materials, supplies, or equipment. Familiarize yourself with the materials needed and be prepared to have them at the workshop. See **Supply Checklist** at right for more information.
- **Participant workbook.** Each module utilizes tip sheets and worksheets included in the ELEVATE Couples Workbook. These worksheets are intended to reinforce principles reviewed and facilitate discussions and activities that help couples process and practice the skills taught. The workbook is available at www.nermen.org/ELEVATE.php.
- **Session overview at a glance.** At the bottom of the one-page overview is a list of the main subjects addressed in the module, corresponding slide numbers, and a suggested breakdown of how time should be allocated to address these topics. While these are intended to serve as a guide when preparing and practicing for each session, you may find that additional time is required or that less time is available, especially considering the number of couples in the class. See the **Recommendations for Delivering ELEVATE** section for more information.



ELEVATE Supply Checklist

- ☒ Flip chart
- ☒ Markers
- ☒ Stack of notecards
- ☒ Timer for pulse count
- ☒ Relationship Wheel
- ☒ *Introduction*: Ground rules written out on flipchart
- ☒ *Empower*: Sheets of paper and markers for “Stressors Crowd Us” activity
- ☒ *Empower*: Small squares of bubble wrap or stress balls (optional)
- ☒ *Lay the Foundation*: One blindfold (bandana) per couple
- ☒ *Enlighten*: Candy rewards for “Newlywed Game” activity
- ☒ *Value*: Standard sticky notes (enough to provide each participant at least two)
- ☒ *Tame*: Clear water bottle with water and 3 Tbsp. dark glitter for “Stress Bottle” demonstration
- ☒ *Engage*: Large balls of yarn (one per 8-10 participant circle)
- ☒ *Engage*: Balloons (two per 8-10 participant circle)

Scripted Lesson Plan

The presentation slides provided with ELEVATE were designed to be simple, with minimal text; as such, they are not intended to serve as a script for the presenter. To aid facilitators in preparing for each lesson, scripted text has been provided. The narrative provided in each module includes:

- **Normal text.** The normally formatted text is the recommended script for presenting the lesson. The script contains the information that is most important for the facilitator to share with the participants. This may be especially helpful to educators who are just getting started with teaching relationship education (in general) or ELEVATE (more specifically). For the more experienced educator, it may not be necessary to stick to the script word-for-word, as long as the educator clearly and accurately describes the research-based information and key teaching points shared in each section.
- **Bolded text.** The bolded text is provided to highlight important elements in the lesson, including activities (“**Activity**”), discussion questions (“**Ask**”), videos (“**Video**”), and when to advance slides (“**Advance to Slide #**”). In addition, all of the references to page numbers in the participant workbook (“**Page #**”) are also bolded.
- **Italicized text.** The text in italics are instructions to the facilitator regarding special prompts to engage participants, setting up or processing activities, or referencing prior content or key points made in the lesson. These italicized instructions may appear within brackets or alone. The name of a video or activity is also provided in italics.

Side Bar Resources and Notes

Along the right or left column of the narrative script, you will find a gray bar that includes the following references and resources:

- **Slide images.** The slide images from the PowerPoint presentation are numbered for easy referencing in preparation as well as in active facilitation.
- **Key point.** These key points provide the facilitator with the main idea of the particular section or set of slides. The facilitator can use this to keep on track with the main learning objectives.
- **Workbook pages.** The *ELEVATE Couples Workbook* was developed to engage participants in the learning process and provide them with resources to review later at home. Workbook pages are described with their title and objective as well as the page number where they can be found. In addition, the slides that correspond with workbook content will have a light bulb icon for prompting.
- **Special notes.** The special notes can help facilitators when dealing with special situations or scenarios throughout the curriculum.
- **Videos.** Videos are an effective medium for reinforcing learning concepts and facilitating discussion. When applicable, videos are described with the title, the length of the clip, directions for downloading it (if you do not have the *ELEVATE Flash drive*), as well as the original video reference URL. See the **Working with Presentation Slides and Videos** section for more information about using the videos.
- **Mindfulness practice.** These practices are featured in the *Empower Yourself*, *Value*, and *Tame* modules. A brief description of each mindfulness practice is provided. See **Active Learning** for more information.
- **Virtual Adaptions.** To support a growing number of facilitators using an online delivery format for reaching couples, recommendations on how to adapt certain activities are provided in the **Virtual Delivery Adaptation Guide**.

Key Point

A quick summary of the main point of a section.



Workbook

Quick references to the participant workbook page numbers.



Special Note

Special instructions or considerations.



Video

Details about the name, length, and location of a video.



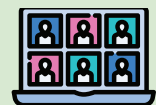
Mindfulness Practice

A special note related to a mindfulness practice.



Virtual Adaptations

See *Virtual Delivery Adaptation Guide*.



Active Learning

The ELEVATE curriculum is designed to engage couples in active learning. To help facilitate this process, the script features the following resources:

- **Activities.** Learning new skills and adopting beliefs and practices that foster healthy couple relationships requires practice. Activities are located in each lesson to either initiate discussion about a principle/skill or to reinforce or practice a principle/skill that was discussed. Each activity is listed by name and has been integrated into the script by the bolded text, “**Activity**.” It is important to prepare ahead of time any necessary materials required as well as to consider special accommodations or adaptations that may be necessary based on your audience, available space, or schedule.
- **Questions to ask.** The ELEVATE program is based on the belief that each couple brings unique experiences and strengths that can enrich the learning experience. As such, discussion is integral to the learning process. Prompts intended to facilitate participant engagement can be found throughout the script by the bolded text, “**Ask**.” You will typically find them around activities and videos designed to initiate discussion around the topic presented.
- **Mindfulness practice.** Mindfulness is an open attention to and awareness of the present moment. When combined with relationship education, mindfulness can help one act skillfully and not emotionally in stressful situations. The ELEVATE curriculum includes three mindfulness-based practices that educators can facilitate during class. For some participants, it may feel awkward to spend this time in a quiet, relaxed state in a group setting. Be aware that you may receive mixed reactions initially. After just a little practice, most participants tend to relax and enjoy this aspect of the program. Although more time can be devoted to mindfulness practices depending on your schedule, only about two minutes have been blocked out in these lessons for each practice in an effort to have participants “sample” the practice. For more information and helpful tips on how to facilitate mindfulness, read *Helping Couples Practice Mindfulness* (ELEVATE – FS-2) included with the Facilitator Manual. Also, the *ELEVATE Couples Workbook* includes a tip sheet on pages 5-6 for couples to help them practice mindfulness on their own after the program.



WORKING WITH THE PRESENTATION SLIDES AND VIDEOS

Navigating the Presentation Slides

Each module includes a PowerPoint slide show that is saved as a PDF document. When you are ready to present:

1. Open the PDF file of the presentation slides for the module you are teaching.
2. Press 'Control+L' or click 'View.'
3. Select 'Full Screen.'

This will enlarge the slide image to full screen (similar to the PowerPoint presentation slide show view). Click on the screen or press arrows to advance slides back and forth. A PowerPoint template file has been included in the curriculum materials. This file contains a template background slide for each of the eight modules. If you are presenting a more abbreviated version of the module, pages in the PDF can be manipulated through the "Tools" function in Adobe Acrobat.



Videos

Many of the modules in ELEVATE use brief videos to reinforce important concepts being taught and to engage participants emotionally. Each video will be listed in both the scripted text in bold ("**Video**") as well as in a side box in the right hand column.

Unless you received an ELEVATE flash drive, with the purchase of the curriculum kit, that includes the presentation slides and videos ready for use, you can download these videos from www.nermen.org/ELEVATE.php. After downloading the video, hyperlinks to the videos can be inserted in the appropriate presentation slides using Adobe Acrobat Pro. In order to link the slide image of the video so that the video will play when the image is clicked on, follow these steps:

1. Open the PDF with the slide show images.
2. Locate the slide with the image of the video to play.
3. Right click the video image and select 'Properties.'
4. Select the 'Actions' tab from the top.
5. From the 'Select Action' dropdown menu, choose 'Open a file' and click 'Add.'
6. Locate the video file you downloaded and click 'Open/Select.'
7. When asked to specify where you want the video to open, choose 'New Window.'
8. Choose 'OK' in the Link Properties box.
9. Save your PDF file and be sure that the location of the video remains where you have set your hyperlinks to.

If you do not want to create hyperlinks from your slide show directly to your videos, you can simply click-and-play the videos from the folder where you saved the video file. Alternatively, you can create a playlist with the media files in your preferred media player. If you have good connectivity, you can also insert hyperlinks to the URLs provided in the curriculum and play from the web.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DELIVERING ELEVATE

Program Schedule

When deciding how to schedule the delivery of ELEVATE, there are several elements to consider, such as space, funding, the availability of co-facilitators, and couples' schedules and competing demands. ELEVATE was developed to provide facilitators with flexibility in delivery options:

- **Eight-class series.** The ELEVATE curriculum includes eight modules, each estimated to require approximately 60-90 minutes to teach with two exceptions: Tame may require 75 minutes (minimum) and Engage may only require about 45 minutes (minimum). Scheduling ELEVATE as an 8-week series provides more time for couples in the group to build rapport and develop supportive relationships with each other, as well as complete the worksheets as homework and practice the skills between sessions. It also allows more time for additional ice-breakers at each session and time for completing evaluation surveys.
- **Six-session series.** The modules can be combined to create six, 2-hour sessions: **(1)** Module 1: Introduction; **(2)** Module 2: Empower + Slides 1-6 of Module 3: Lay the Foundation; **(3)** Slides 7-14 of Module 3: Lay the Foundation + Module 4: Enlighten; **(4)** Module 5: Value + Slides 1-6 of Module 6: Attach; **(5)** Slides 7-21 of Module 6: Attach + Slides 1-12 of Module 7: Tame; **(6)** Slides 13-19 of Module 7: Tame + Module 8: Engage. This option still provides similar benefits noted above and allows for survey collection in the first and last classes and group mealtime.
- **Four-class series.** Alternatively, the modules can be combined to create four, 2-3 hour sessions: **(1)** Module 1: Introduction + Module 2: Empower; **(2)** Module 3: Lay the Foundation + Module 4: Enlighten; **(3)** Module 5: Value + Module 6: Attach; and **(4)** Module 7: Tame + Module 8: Engage. This option still provides similar benefits noted above, and may be more accommodating to the couples' schedules.
- **Two-day or one-day weekend retreat.** This option may be preferable if couples have limited availability and/or you intend to reach a larger group of couples. In a two-day format, the ELEVATE program could begin on Friday evening (2-3 hours) and resume Saturday (5-9 hours). The amount of time required will depend on the proximity of the program to couples and expectations regarding meals (e.g., will you provide meals or will couples go out for meals?) and other activities to keep couples engaged. If ELEVATE is offered in a one-day format, it should be noted that facilitators need to be very intentional with time management and participant engagement. During pilot-testing, ELEVATE was successfully implemented in an 8-hour, Saturday conference-style format that included four groups of 20-25 couples per group, each with two facilitators. Breakfast, lunch, and afternoon snack breaks were also provided, which reduced the amount of available teaching time required to teach the 8-hours of content. Thus, it is important that facilitators plan ahead on which material to consolidate and trim depending on the needs of their couples and your specific presentation requirements. In this format, there is typically less time for couples to complete worksheets during the session; these can be assigned as follow-up "homework."



Facilitator Tips

The following tips and guidelines can be used to prepare for your presentation. Plan to spend time preparing for your workshop and make sure you have all of your materials ready. Be sure that you have a back-up plan if you rely on technology. Ensure that your plan is flexible enough to allow for participant comments and questions.

Below are some tips taken or adapted from the products featured in the **Facilitator Resources:**

Choose effective co-facilitators.

Relationship Educators are the face and glue of your program. Great educators and group leaders are important for the success, strength, and operation of a program. Make sure you are looking for skilled workshop leaders, not just anyone interested in helping. It is difficult to teach someone to be a good relationship educator if they don't have some natural talent or experience. Volunteer recruitment strategies may be different depending on the position you are trying to fill. Remember, just like hiring an employee, you want to recruit for a specific "position" or skill set. Research indicates that facilitation skills are a key predictor of enhanced benefits of the program; however, it also indicates that similarity between facilitators and participants (e.g., gender, race) can be helpful as well.

Encourage an atmosphere of acceptance and mutual respect for group members. Dress appropriately and smile. Portray self-confidence. Greet each participant as they come into class and make a personal connection. This creates a welcoming environment. Understand the importance of nonverbal communication. Be sure that the way you sit or stand, your tone of voice, and your facial expressions match your message. Participants will only mirror back the level of enthusiasm for the topic they see expressed by the facilitator. Make sure to position yourself in a way that you can easily engage and work with the group. Strong facilitators also pay close attention to the nonverbal communication of participants. Demonstrate acceptance and respect as you interact with participants. Know your audience. Good facilitators provide information that is relevant to their audience and share personal experiences when appropriate. An effective facilitator is culturally competent and will augment or adapt material if some parts of the curriculum aren't culturally appropriate. Be a good listener. When communicating with participants, facilitators should model turn-taking and reflective listening skills.

Remember, it's education, not therapy. It is important to remember that marriage education is not therapy. It is about delivering a message, that when used well, can help transform a person's relationship. It is incredibly easy to grow close with participants, particularly if they share specifics about their lives, their children, their pains, and their victories. But while you are showing compassion and empathy,



Facilitator Resources

- *Tips for Facilitators – Dealing with Difficult Class Participants*
<https://tinyurl.com/y5h2xc9b>
- *Tips for Facilitators – Adult Learning Styles*
<https://tinyurl.com/y3q6zmdx>
- *Effective Facilitation: Tips for improving skills and engaging audiences*
<https://tinyurl.com/yydmxew6>
- *My Relationship Isn't Perfect – How Can I Be a Marriage Educator?*
<https://tinyurl.com/y3u9ruwl>
- *How to Get Men to Open Up in MRE Classes*
<https://tinyurl.com/y5fqjash>
- *Personal and Professional Boundaries for Marriage Educators*
<https://tinyurl.com/yxnj5qon>
- *Using Volunteers Effectively in Delivering Marriage Education Workshops*
<https://tinyurl.com/y5qbvhff>

Source: www.healthymarriageinfo.org

remember where your job ends and their participation begins. It is an educator's responsibility to monitor the amount of personal disclosure to ensure that everyone in the group is comfortable. It may be necessary to skillfully acknowledge the emotion involved and redirect the discussion back to a broader educational point, encouraging a participant who is disclosing too much information to talk with you during a break. Even if you are a licensed professional, in this capacity your job is to impart skills, not do couple-specific problem solving. Keep a list of respected professionals available for referrals when needed and make referrals in a timely manner to get your participants the additional assistance they need.

Understand adult learners. Adult learners have a wealth of life experiences and knowledge that has shaped and established their values, beliefs, and opinions. Keep in mind that adults like to be involved in their learning process by directing it themselves. Stay away from long, non-interactive lectures; activities and discussions are the best paths to adult learning. Brief them on the benefits of the lesson and how it applies to real life before the lesson begins.

Marriage and relationship educators must recognize their participants' expertise and life experiences:

- Ask about their needs, expectations and interests.
- Acknowledge their accomplishments.
- Recognize the diversity of the group members and respect their views.
- Act like a collaborator as opposed to an "expert."

Learning takes place on two levels. Participants need *cognitive* information to make choices about significant life changes, while *affective* or emotional learning motivates people to maintain these changes. The most important thing to remember about ELEVATE participants is that they are attending the workshop voluntarily. They are full of their own experiences that can add quite a bit of value to the overall curriculum. Encourage a safe environment for sharing personal experience, but do not ever force participation. Start and end each session with an opportunity for people to share what they learned or how they have used the skills. A ritual of sharing can encourage group cohesion and give people something to look forward to at the start of each workshop. Similarly, summarize key learning concepts at the end of each class, encourage the completion of the action plan, and wrap up the session with a homework assignment that will continue the learning process until the next session.

Room preparation. The room set up for this workshop can be a horseshoe seating pattern, where the presenters and the visual aids are positioned at the widest part of the horseshoe or, traditional seating where the presenter stands in front of rows of seated participants in chairs or rows of chairs and tables. Most important is that the couples are sitting comfortably next to each other, that they are able to see the visual aids (projector screen,





etc.), and that they can hear the audio (of speakers and videos). They will also be using workbooks, so it will be important for them to be able to write and talk comfortably. Be sure to plan ahead for how to prepare the room for special activities. In some cases, the tables may need to be cleared of bags, drinks, and/or papers. Also, make sure there is a good area to place the flip chart or sticky paper. Adjust the teaching as needed to flow in the space where the workshop will take place.

Establish clear expectations. It is very important to review both the expectations of the participants in terms of desired outcomes as well as review the expectations of conduct during the workshop. Having the participants voice their expectations of what they want to get out of the program helps them to develop a sense of “buy-in” to the learning experience. It is also a great way to set up and evaluate clear outcomes. Since it is necessary to do this at the beginning of the session, participants may be reluctant to voice expectations. Facilitate the sharing process by providing some examples. There is also the option of having the participants write one or two expectations on a note card that can then be shared anonymously. Further detail instructions for this process are provided in Module 1. At the end of each module, this curriculum prompts the facilitator to assess how well they are meeting the expectations.

Set clear “ground rules.” It is important to protect the emotional safety and educational value of the program for all participants. Remind participants that excessive talking or noise-making in the form of devices, shuffling papers, etc., should be avoided, particularly during the mindfulness practices. Assurances of confidentiality and respect for fellow participants are important. These reminders can be called “Ground Rules” and when reviewed and agreed upon at the beginning of the training, can serve as a preventative measure for maintaining a peaceful and supportive group dynamic. Further detail instructions for this process are provided in Module 1.

Be prepared to deal with difficult people. Difficult people can be “challengers,” “know-it-alls,” “off-task,” “negative,” “disruptors,” or “distracters.” The facilitator should be comfortable re-directing these people and should be prepared to gently confront their behavior outside of the class or in the class if necessary. **Do** call a short break during class after encountering that difficult someone so that you can regroup. Use that time to relax and gather your thoughts. **Do** take a “soft” approach to disarm the abrasive person. Surprise the person by seeking out and focusing on their positive traits. Find one thing that may be likeable about that person and try to engage them on that topic. Difficult people are used to alienating others and can sometimes be diffused by a positive response and approach from another person. **Don’t** discuss the difficult person with group participants either individually or as a group. Everyone recognizes this person. Conferring with the group to validate your feelings and perceptions will cause you to be seen as a gossip, and you will lose credibility.

Be yourself. Use jokes and humor if that comes naturally to you, or use examples or stories that you have heard/read that touched you. Personalizing the information in your own way can be effective at building a relationship with your group.

Recruiting and Engaging Couples

ELEVATE is designed to engage a wide range of couples (including the LGBTQ community) who are dating, cohabitating, premarital, etc. Facilitators should be culturally competent and ready to serve a diversity of people from different ethnicities, cultures, and backgrounds including Hispanic, Black/African-American, Asian, same-sex, and many others. The ELEVATE curriculum is enriched by the recruitment of diverse participants.

Below are some tips taken or adapted from the products featured in the **Recruitment and Retention Resources** to support you in your efforts to engage couples:

Premarital couples. An engagement is an exciting experience for couples as they prepare for their marriage. While most couples invest lots of time and energy into planning for the wedding, fewer couples focus their time on preparing for marriage. ELEVATE would be a great way to support engaged couples in developing the basic relationship skills they need to maintain a healthy and stable marriage. In fact, premarital education, in general, has been shown to improve couple satisfaction in marriage. Consider partnering with local places of worship to either help you promote ELEVATE or host classes for engaged couples. In some states, incentives may be available (e.g., reduced marriage license fees) for couples who complete a certain number of premarital education or counseling hours.

Nonmarried couples that live together. Studies show that cohabiting relationships are somewhat less stable than marital relationships; therefore, nonmarried couples may especially benefit from relationship education. It is important for marriage educators to be mindful of the messages they are sending. Be aware of any statements that could be viewed as critical of living



Recruitment and Retention Resources

- *Recruiting Expectant Couples*
<https://tinyurl.com/y2m9g37t>
- *Recruiting Couples That Are Living Together for Relationship Education*
<https://tinyurl.com/y5fpn4wg>
- *Recruiting Premarital Couples for Marriage Education. How-To Guide*
<https://tinyurl.com/y4sbqg6t>
- *Recruiting and Serving Stepfamilies*
<https://tinyurl.com/yys8puyr>
- *Appealing to Hispanic Men (Migrant Workers): Strategies for Recruitment and Engagement in Marriage Education.*
<https://tinyurl.com/yy8sku4t>
- *Engaging Men in Marriage Education. How-To Guide*
<https://tinyurl.com/y6emap92>
- *Engaging African American Men in Healthy Marriage Services*
<https://tinyurl.com/y3o4ca9q>
- *Effective Marketing and Recruitment Strategies for Relationship Education Programs Serving Native Americans*
<https://tinyurl.com/yyen5f6o>
- *Promising Practices Guide – Healthy Marriage and Relationship Programs: Promising Practices in Serving Low-Income and Culturally Diverse Populations*
<https://tinyurl.com/y27ykxdd>
- *Outreach Strategies for Marriage and Relationship Education in Rural communities*
<https://tinyurl.com/y6os35rr>
- *Retention: If Participants Were Boomerangs . . .*
<https://tinyurl.com/y4k7cguv>

Source: www.healthymarriageinfo.org

together or “promoting” of marriage. The core skills taught in ELEVATE should be helpful for any couple, regardless of their marital status.

Stepfamilies/blended families. About 40 percent of married couples with children are living in a stepfamily, and this proportion is even higher for low-income married couples with children. About half of cohabiting couples with children are living in a stepfamily. Stepfamilies face unique dynamics and challenges as they blend two families into one. Factors, such as negotiating parenting roles between biological parents and stepfamilies and relations between stepparents and stepchildren can affect the quality of the couple relationship. ELEVATE provides core skills that will be helpful for stepfamily couples. Facilitators may also want to provide additional resources and information for these couples. A free online program is available for stepfamily couples at www.stepfamilies.info.

Expectant couples. This is a point in people’s lives when they are open to new information and making positive life changes. It can also be a very stressful time. Preparing ahead of time can be a great move for expecting couples since they are focused on creating a better place to raise their baby. This is a great opportunity to recruit for your healthy couples program! Reach out to local birthing hospitals or other community partners to explore opportunities to promote or host ELEVATE as a part of their educational programs that serve new parents.



Document Your Impact!

Quality family life education programming doesn’t stop at just teaching classes. Sustaining your program relies on showing others (e.g., co-workers, supervisor, funders, community partners) that it can make a difference! Program evaluation involves not just documenting who came to your program (“outputs”), but what they got out of the program (“outcomes”). Research shows that relationship and marriage education does positively affect couple relationship behaviors and quality. Although you may not have the resources to carry out an extensive evaluation of your program that follows couples over time, you can still show similar impacts. Tools have been provided with ELEVATE to help you document how the program is influencing the relationship quality of the couples you reach. To access these evaluation resources, visit www.nermen.org/ELEVATE.php.

NOTES

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