

FOREWORD

We live in times of upheaval and change when it comes to marriage and family relationships. Everyone has been touched directly or indirectly by the pain of divorce, troubled marriages, hardships of out-of-wedlock-childbirths, and changes in how people view and approach marriage. Yet, at the same time, it is very clear that most people desire a long-lasting, happy marriage. Despite having this dream, many, especially young Americans, do not have confidence in their ability to have a happy marriage that lasts a lifetime. More than any previous generation, this generation of young people that you work with may be the most in touch with both the desire for lasting, healthy marriage and haunting doubts as to whether it's possible. The Connections + PREP®: Relationships and Marriage curriculum is designed to help you prepare your students to reach for their dreams about marriage and family life. You will teach your students about facts, expectations, values, and skills that might help them in the years to come to make wise choices about relationships, and to be better prepared to develop strong and happy marriages and families in their adult lives.

We have worked in the field of marital and family research since the 1970s. Over this period of time, we have witnessed a dramatic increase in consensus among public policy experts, government administrators, politicians, educators, religious leaders and those in the media that more can be done to help young people in their relationships— especially when it comes to marriage and family. Over this period of time, we have also seen (and taken some part in) an explosion of research on marriage and family that has helped those who are interested to refine their efforts to help young people achieve their aspirations for quality relationships.

Connections has a unique place in the spectrum of tools that are available to help high school aged children as they develop their beliefs and expectations about marriage and family. A recent review of the available high school curricula concluded that Connections was tops.¹

¹ *Can Kids Get Smart About Marriage? A Veteran Teacher Reviews Some Leading Marriage and Relationship Education Programs.* Marline Pearson, 2000. New Jersey: National Marriage Project.

Connections received particularly high marks for its blending of solid information, values supporting marriage, and direct teaching about marriage.

One of our areas of expertise as marital researchers has been in the development of educational materials for young couples planning marriage. Based on decades of research, we have been developing and refining our program for couples called PREP (The Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program). PREP is *empirically informed*, meaning that, to the extent possible, the strategies of PREP are based on the growing body of research on marital and family health. PREP is also *empirically tested*. PREP has been studied intensively, including long-term outcome studies by six different research teams in four different countries. Further, the program is *regularly refined* based on the latest research. PREP has become a leading program for couples over the years because of its very strong basis in sound research on marital success and failure.

In 2002, we began talking actively with the developers and publisher of Connections about combining some of the strengths of our approach with the strengths of Connections. What you hold in your hands is the product of this collaboration. Connections + PREP: Relationships and Marriage retains all the greatest things about Connections. In fact, for those familiar with Connections, you will see much that is very familiar in these pages. What we have added to this effort is some of the strong, research based principles and knowledge that come from our many years in this field. The resulting program is one that we have utmost confidence in. Connections + PREP: Relationships and Marriage is not PREP, for PREP has other distinctive characteristics and it is a program first and foremost for committed couples. However, we think we have been able to add some elements to an already great program, especially in terms of knowledge about marital success and failure and some strategies for improving one's odds.

If you are reading this, you likely have both the responsibility and some passion for helping young people experience the best in life—including their eventual marriage and family relationships. We believe that Connections + PREP: Relationships and Marriage is a very strong, state-of-the-art tool to help you in your mission to help young people. It is our pleasure to highly recommend this curriculum to you.

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ABOUT THE CURRICULUM:

The *Connections + PREP*: *Relationships and Marriage* unit has been written in four sections: Section I - Personality, Section II - Relationships, Section III - Communication, and Section IV - Marriage. The materials have been written to allow the instructor maximum flexibility with the subject matter. Each of the sections can be taught separately when integrated with other subject areas or they may be taught in sequence as an eighteen lesson unit. Instructors may incorporate materials and motivators of their own, which are suitable for their particular groups and are compatible with the stated goals and objectives of the unit. This curriculum includes a student workbook, an instructor's manual, student copies of The Keirseley Temperament Sorter, marriage unit game cards, and overhead transparency masters.

Lessons have been designed so that evaluation of student achievement is more qualitative than quantitative, more concerned with process and continuing growth than with a specific measurable product. Homework assignments have been limited to those which extend the lesson's purpose or lead into a new lesson, and actively involve students in their own learning.

The purpose of the workbook is to assist young people in gaining a better understanding of themselves, to help identify positive or negative patterns of behavior that influence the quality of relationships, to clarify perceptions and expectations in dating relationships and to offer guidelines for choosing a life mate.

The marriage section of the workbook is designed to increase awareness of specific areas of importance within the marriage relationship. These areas include: setting priorities, sharing responsibility for the children, understanding the fundamentals of family finances, working through crisis, and learning how to enjoy time spent together.

The *Connections + PREP*: *Relationships and Marriage* unit provides the students with the opportunity throughout the lessons to develop practical interactive skills in communication which is the basis for all successful life relationships. The unit is most directly applicable in the following classes: family life education, social studies, family consumer sciences and health education.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

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CA. She is also a Certified Family Life Educator (CFLE). As an educator, Ms. Kamper is active in student and parent training classes at local schools and is a frequent lecturer on student issues at national conferences and organizations.

Connections + PREP^o: Relationships and Marriage
EIGHTEEN LESSON UNIT

Section I	Personality	Three 55-minute sessions
Lesson 1	What It's Like to Be Me Poster Page	
Lesson 2	Understanding Myself Better Interview...Up Close	
Lesson 3	Your Plan for Life	
Section II	Relationships	Four 55-minute sessions
Lesson 4	Things Change Positive Relationships	
Lesson 5	Expectations	
Lesson 6	Attractions Getting Acquainted My Ideal Person	
Lesson 7	Dating and Emotions Breaking Up	
Section III	Communication	Three 55-minute sessions
Lesson 8	Family Patterns Types of Filters	
Lesson 9	Dealing with Conflict	
Lesson 10	Let's Talk Listening	
Section IV	Marriage	Eight 55-minute sessions
Lesson 11	Components of Relationships What Is Love?	
Lesson 12	Roadblocks to Relationships Before You Marry	
Lesson 13	Making the Decision Priorities The Wedding Marriage License	
Lesson 14	A Portrait Family Album	
Lesson 15	Finances	

	The Family Budget
Lesson 16	Our Crisis
Lesson 17	Family Vacation
Lesson 18	Marriage Evaluation

INSTRUCTOR'S KIT

**Workbook
Assignment**

Dealing with Conflict

Overview

This lesson will focus on learning how to resolve conflict in relationships by communicating safely and openly. Students will be introduced to the Speaker/Listener Technique for communication. This technique is best used when there is conflict or sensitive issues to discuss.

Objectives

- ◆ Students will discuss the importance of controlling difficult situations.
 - ◆ Students will practice handling disagreements using the Speaker/Listener Technique.
 - ◆ Students will learn the value of compromise.
 - ◆ Students will learn that listening does not mean agreeing.
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Vocabulary

compromise

paraphrase

Key Concepts

- Emotional safety is critical to having great communication.
- Structure provides for greater safety. This is done by using agreed upon rules for handling difficult topics.
- The Speaker/Listener Technique is a great way to practice better communication in general.
- This technique counteracts all of the Danger Signs already discussed.
- Compromise is an important component in conflict resolution.
- Learning the Speaker/Listener Technique takes practice. It's not easy undoing old patterns, especially if they are negative.
- Time Out is a strategy for calming down in order to stop escalation.

Preparation for Lesson

Instructor will need:

- Cut out the Conflict Cards and put on individual index cards. Use the Speaker/Listener “Floor” cards, one for every two students in class.
- Overhead transparency **Communication: Dealing with Conflict** (9-1)
- Workbook pages 27-28: *Dealing with Conflict*

Teaching the Lesson

Have the students turn to workbook page 27, *Dealing with Conflict*. Suggest to the students that differences in communication styles between individuals within a family or individuals who are dating may result in conflict. One of the primary causes of conflict in relationships is the inability to communicate effectively. Through this exercise, students will become aware of typical communication/behavior patterns they use. After reading the instructions on the worksheet, assign the first section (Take A Look) of *Dealing with Conflict*. Allow the students 5-6 min. to complete this portion.

- The students will now be introduced to a new way of communicating when there is a need to discuss difficult topics or there is the potential for conflict. The *Connections + PREP: Relationships and Marriage* program kit provides two ways for students to practice this communication style: using the “Floor” or the ear/lip models.

- If the students are able to go directly to the Speaker/Listener Technique with little difficulty understanding the concepts, use the “Floor” as it is presented in the lesson. However, for students who need additional time to work on the concept at an introductory level before using the “Floor”, ear and lip learning aids have also been included in the program kit. These can be exchanged during the role play part of the lesson instead of the “Floor” until the students are more comfortable and proficient with the technique. Proceed with the following instructions for teaching the lesson using either method.

- Direct their attention to page 28 of the workbook. Each workbook has included a “Floor”. Tell them that this is going to be used to demonstrate how disagreements can be handled in a way that allows both partners to express their feelings in a safe environment.
- Explain to the students that the Speaker/Listener Technique is not to be used all of the time. Instead, this technique is most effective when people are dealing with a difficult topic or when it is necessary to understand each other better. Practicing will make the technique seem more natural.
- Ask for two volunteers to come to the front of the class to demonstrate the Speaker/Listener Technique. After reading one of the Conflict Cards, ask the student volunteers to role-play the situation. Show them how the “Floor” is used (see Lecture Notes).
- Divide the class into groups of four to six students. Give each group a “Floor”. Hand out the Conflict Cards among the groups (or the instructor may wish to have the students create new situations to use).
- The groups should have 8-10 minutes to discuss and act out the various situations presented on the cards. They should practice using the “Floor” or ear/lips model to show whose turn it is to speak. The instructor may determine that more time is necessary. If additional time allows, the instructor may ask students from each group to role-play for the class what they have learned.

Questions for discussion:

1. How do family patterns influence how we argue with others?
2. Why is it so difficult to listen when someone disagrees with us?

- Continue the discussion by reminding the participants that family styles of communication can vary significantly. When two people disagree, the family patterns for settling conflict come out. Encourage them again that it’s possible to learn new ways of settling conflict.

- Show them the overhead **Dealing with Conflict**. Help them understand that following these guidelines will greatly increase their success as an effective communicator when disagreements arise.
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LECTURE NOTES:

The Speaker/Listener Technique, developed by PREP, is a powerful way to communicate safely and with respect on tough topics. This is not a way to communicate most of the time. It is a way to communicate effectively when you are dealing with a difficult topic or when understanding each other is especially important. When people practice this simple technique, they find that they communicate better even when not using the technique. Practicing helps individuals learn to inhibit some of the negative patterns in communication that get people in trouble. One person can initiate the Speaker/Listener Technique to improve the communication, but it is more powerful if both people agree to use the technique. Practice makes the technique more natural.

Relationships grow stronger when partners can communicate in a safe environment. Establishing rules for disagreement and having a plan for resolving differences respectfully is important for the success of any relationship. PREP has developed a tool called the “Floor” that can be used when couples are learning to share thoughts and feelings when they disagree or when the subject is emotionally sensitive. The person holding the “Floor” has the opportunity to speak. The other partner listens and waits to respond until the “Floor” is handed to them. Partners can practice this Speaker/Listener Technique as a way of developing new strategies for handling conflict.

To begin the discussion process, partners exchange the “Floor” between them, depending on whose turn it is to speak at the time. When using the Speaker/Listener Technique, the Speaker speaks in short statements. This makes it easier for the Listener to paraphrase what has been said. Paraphrasing is summarizing in one’s own words what the Speaker has just said. A good paraphrase captures all of the Speaker’s major points. In order to paraphrase accurately, the Listener must edit out (temporarily ignore) personal thoughts and feelings while the Speaker is speaking. Sometimes the Speaker may need to say something that will be painful for the Listener to hear, or the statement will trigger the desire for an immediate rebuttal. If the Listener is having trouble staying in the Listener role, the discussion can stop for a few minutes or the partners can exchange the “Floor” more frequently.

The Speaker/Listener Technique is a way to discuss “hot topics” in a relationship. “Hot topics” for many couples can include money, friends, children, in-laws, and religion. This technique is a

way to talk to one another without fighting. It counteracts the four danger signs: prevents escalation, inhibits invalidation, encourages the withdrawer to talk and exposes negative interpretations. The Speaker/Listener Technique is not designed to be used all of the time. The goal of this technique is for each partner to feel understood by the other partner. The goal is not agreement. The goal is not to solve the problem at this time. The students will exercise this technique as part of this lesson. PREP teaches couples this technique because, when using it, the Danger Signs are virtually impossible to use.

Healthy relationships are protected from conflict when the partners recognize conversations that are not going well. The partners are able to shift out of the cycle of escalation in order to protect the relationship. This does not mean putting off dealing with important issues indefinitely. It does mean having confidence that they are able to handle the situation well instead of doing a lot of damage. One key is having a way to stop escalation when it is occurring.

Some couples are able to keep things from getting out of control by using humor or other natural means to reduce feelings and defuse the situation. Another effective way to reduce escalation is to use Time Outs. These are break times in the discussion that provide one or both partners distance from the intensity of the conversation. Either partner can call a Time Out when needed, but both partners should agree ahead of time on a mutual signal to let the other know it is coming. They should also agree on the duration of the Time Out before continuing the discussion. Anyone can learn to use the Time Out technique as an agreed upon way to protect a relationship.

Sources of Conflict:

- * If you believe you must be right, every conflict is unresolved until your partner surrenders.
- * If you believe you cannot survive rejection, you will strive to please your partner at all costs.
- * If you believe you must be in control in order to be recognized, you can expect conflict to be part of your relationship.
- * If you believe you must be perfect, you can expect disappointments because all humans are imperfect.

COMMUNICATION

Dealing with Conflict

Guidelines:

- Agree on the rules of discussion before you begin; stick to the rules!
- Don't let the discussion get out of control, good decisions are rarely made in anger.
- TIME OUT: either partner can call one at any time. Agree to respect this as a cue when things are not going right. Decide together to drop the issue for the time being or shift into a safer way to communicate.
- Mutually agree on the time and place to discuss a serious issue.
- Remain on the topic, don't bring up past hurts.
- Give equal time for both sides to be heard.
- Listen to each other, the feelings being expressed are *real*.
- Be prepared to compromise, no one gets to have his or her way every time.