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About PAIRS (Practical Application of Intimate Relationship Skills) Skills for Successful Relationships and Emotional Literacy

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PAIRS IS A MULTIDIMENSIONAL MODEL INTEGRATING IMPORTANT UNIVERSAL CONCEPTS, SKILLS, AND VALUES ABOUT LOVE, INTIMACY, AND MARRIAGE. Congruent with other models based on research, PAIRS is an emotionally focused educational model that strengthens secure attachment and emotional bonds for couples and families through carefully designed and sequenced relationship tools that develop relationship competence and emotional literacy.

Theoretically, the PAIRS program integrates affective, behavioral, and cognitive models. The conceptual strength of PAIRS comes from emphasis on bonding – defined as emotional openness and physical closeness. In this model, bonding is essential for both establishing and maintaining emotional literacy and secure attachment for individuals, freeing them to explore important cognitive/attitudinal shifts, behavioral change and emotional maturity

Love, Intimacy, and Marriage

PAIRS is based on the concept that primary intimate relationships have a unique role in shaping self-esteem and our responses to the world around us. PAIRS teaches the affective, behavioral, and cognitive skills needed to establish healthy intimate partnerships while also recognizing and validating individual differences. Living together and reconciling differences through compassion, communication, and love creates an atmosphere of goodwill and trust. These elements, combined, create a powerful loving force – transformative, stabilizing and energizing for individuals within a relationship.

Bridging Treatment, Education, and Enrichment

Research on marital satisfaction conducted since the early 1940s suggests benefits of a satisfying intimate marriage include better health, a more active sex life, higher income, better adjustment among offspring, and greater work incentive (Dawson, 1991; Kiecolt-Glaser, Fisher, Ogrocki, Stout, Speicher, & Glaser (1987); Lillard & Waite,

1995; Waite & Lillard, 1991). Concomitantly, research documents deleterious physical, emotional, financial, and social effects of divorce (Beach & O'Leary, 1986; Bloom, Asher & White, 1978; Copportelli & Orleans, 1985; Glenn & Kramer, 1987; Martin & Bumpass, 1989; O'Leary & Curley, 1986; Sotile, 1992).

Couples today face unique challenges as they struggle to create a new form of marriage and intimacy. Although the viability of marriage in contemporary society is questioned by some [see, for example, Coontz, S (1992), Stacey, J (1990)], support for marriage is growing (Waite & Gallagher, 2000; Glenn, Nock & Waite, 2002). Luquet (2000) goes beyond this debate to suggest the model of marriage and intimate partnership appears to be evolving. Luquet suggests we are moving from the traditional role-bound marriage structure toward partnership marriage and, eventually, spiritual marriage. Despite criticism of his work, Gray's (1994) unprecedented commercial success writing about relationships suggests a public hungry for ways to enhance their relationships.

Why do marital and couples therapists need to know about PAIRS? Unfortunately, current reviews suggest marital therapy is effective only in 30% of cases (Jacobson & Addis, 1993). While not dismal, this rate simply is not good enough, when one considers the potentially devastating effects of divorce and family break-up (Amato & Booth, 1997, Hetherington & Kelly, 2002; Wallerstein, 2000). Justifiably, the field of marriage and family therapy is encouraging research-based practice to ensure the effectiveness of interventions.

Best Practice in Marriage Education: The PAIRS Model

PAIRS (Gordon, 1988; Gordon, 1993), a 120-hour relationship skills-based program with its adaptations, is the most comprehensive of all the marriage and relationship programs. An integrated model, the curriculum pays attention to communication skills, conflict resolution processes, emotional literacy, individual differences and family-of-origin influences, sexuality and sensuality, and the development of conscious expectations (Berger & Hannah, 1999; DeMaria, 1993; DeMaria & Hannah, 2002; Gordon, 1993). PAIRS exemplifies a clinically-based, educational model that attends to ethics, program evaluation, and ongoing training for leaders.

Several studies have been conducted to evaluate the long-term impact of PAIRS. Durana (1996a) studied married participants (N = 137) from five different PAIRS classes throughout the U.S. Participants were evaluated pre-PAIRS, post-PAIRS, and six to

eight months after course completion. The study used both quantitative and qualitative measures, including marital adjustment (Locke-Wallace Marital Adjustment Test), marital satisfaction (Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale), conflict/unhappiness (Beier-Sternberg Scale), and client satisfaction (Client Satisfaction Questionnaire) along with an open-ended questionnaire on participants' experiences with the program. The sample consisted of persons who were more distressed, higher in conflict and unhappiness, and lower in marital satisfaction than those in the general population. At the time of participation, 51% of these participants also were receiving couples or individual therapy. Findings at post-PAIRS showed increases in marital adjustment and marital satisfaction in addition to reduced conflict and unhappiness. Distressed couples made statistically significant improvements in conflict reduction. At follow-up six to eight months' later participants reported enduring changes in desired areas, and their expectations and reasons for attending PAIRS appeared to coincide with the aims of the program. Most participants gave positive ratings to the group component of the experience. Over half of the sample reported PAIRS helped them make better use of therapy. Improvements in relationships with children, friends, and family of origin were also reported.

Durana (1998) also conducted a study of the enhancement and maintenance of intimacy, which is viewed as a critical element in the development of healthy relationships. Married program participants (N = 137) from several PAIRS classes were assessed pre-PAIRS, post-PAIRS, and six to eight months after PAIRS completion. These participants also reported relatively high levels of distress and lower intimacy than the general population. Durana included measures of intimacy (Waring Intimacy Questionnaire) and marital adjustment (Locke-Wallace Marital Adjustment Test) along with a qualitative measure of clients' perceptions of intimacy. At the six to eight month follow-up, the majority of participants (76%) demonstrated sustained gains in intimacy. In addition, initial gender differences impact on intimacy appeared to have diminished.

To assess the relationship between PAIRS participation and individual outcome variables, adult interaction style, use of projective and perceptive identification, and marital discord, Turner (1998) studied 75 participants from eight cities in the United States. She compared findings on the study group with those of a control group (a non-equivalent group of 45 subjects who were waiting to be enrolled in PAIRS). The two groups were similar in age, gender, education, distress, times married, and pretest scores. Pre- to post-intervention improvements were found on interaction style, social support, and marital discord. Turner correlated the changes in marital discord with those in social support, finding PAIRS had significant effect on the positive changes in marital discord.

To further compare changes in marital discord with attendance in therapy Turner found that control group members all worsened while PAIRS participants who attended therapy predominantly improved (60% got better while 26% got worse). For those who did not attend therapy during treatment time, PAIRS participants were more likely to improve than control group members. For controls who attended therapy, 80% were in individual sessions while 20% were in couples therapy. This result, statistically significant for controls (Pearson chi-square = 9.171, $p=.057$), suggests therapy alone, particularly individual therapy, may not be beneficial for improvement of marital discord. This statistical analysis adds to the support of psychoeducational groups as appropriate treatment for marital discord.

DeMaria (1998) conducted a survey on PAIRS participants in 16 states. She used both a semi-structured survey form and intensive interviews to explore the characteristics of 129 married couples enrolled in PAIRS courses led by 20 different PAIRS leaders. The study examined the relationship between couple types, levels of satisfaction, and variables including sexual satisfaction (using ENRICH), divorce potential (Marital Status Inventory), conflict tactics (Conflict Tactic Scale), romantic love (Passionate Love Scale), and attachment style (Adult Attachment Scale). The study also explored motivations for enrolling in PAIRS. Based on the ENRICH typology, these couples were conflicted and devitalized (93% of the sample). Despite initially low levels of sexual satisfaction, some consideration of divorce, occasional episodes of physical violence, and previous experience in marital therapy, the sample reported high levels of romantic love and was found to be securely attached. The findings suggested these participants were highly motivated to participate in the PAIRS program.

Early research on change inducing elements of PAIRS focused primarily on the Bonding and Emotional Expressiveness (B.E.L.) segment, revealing that B.E.L. is a key element in keeping with findings that support affective interventions (Johnson,1996). Durana (1994, 1996b; 1996c) conducted three studies to determine the impact of the Bonding and Emotional Literacy (B.E.L.) segment of the PAIRS program. Nine volunteers from a group of 31 participants took part in a pre- and post-assessment of the B.E.L. Subjects were given the Fundamental Interpersonal Relations Orientation Behavior (FIRO-B) questionnaire and the State-Trait Anger Expression Inventory (STAXI). An in-depth interview was used to allow for a qualitative analysis.

Results from the FIRO-B indicated increases on compatibility between partners and on balance between manifest behavior and behavior desired by others. There also were statistically significant pre-to-post reductions in the expression of anger and of hostility. Most participants reported the workshop enhanced their empathy for others, aided in conflict resolution, developed emotional openness, and increased their ability to listen.

Durana (1996b) also explored the effects of using emotions and bonding in the B.E.L. segment. He analyzed a case study in light of relevant psychotherapy literature on emotions, catharsis, and touch. He proposed that bonding and catharsis facilitates change through both remembrance of painful experiences and gratification of unsatisfied needs.

In another study that combined quantitative and qualitative research methods to evaluate the impact of the B.E.L., Durana (1996c) assessed 54 participants at four different points in time (pre-PAIRS, pre-B.E.L., post-B.E.L., and post-PAIRS). By examining scores on a variety of outcome variables, including marital adjustment (DAS), self-esteem (Index of Self-Esteem), anxiety, control, and support (Illinois Survey of Well-Being), Durana found statistically significant improvements over time in marital adjustment, cohesion, self-esteem, and emotional well-being. Qualitative reports further suggested the B.E.L. segment is useful for expressing feelings, enhancing intimacy, identifying negative interactions rooted in family-of-origin history, and helping differentiate between the need for bonding and the need for sex. These results suggested the B.E.L. may be an important element of PAIRS, as it enhances marital adjustment, cohesion, and self-esteem and reduces anxiety.

Based on findings from the same study, Durana (1996c) suggested gender differences might be associated with changes in marital satisfaction. Separate analyses of male and female scores, which were measured for the B.E.L. alone and for the entire PAIRS course, showed females reporting greater change on a larger number of variables, including interpersonal ones, in comparison with males. Men showed greater change on measures of personal constructs (self-esteem, control, depression and anxiety) as opposed to interpersonal measures. Participants come to PAIRS hoping to learn how to improve their communication and conflict resolution, understand their partner, build trust, express feelings, and increase positive feelings and intimacy. The findings summarized here suggest that, for most participants, these expectations are met. In addition, there is evidence that participants' gains are consonant with those promised by the PAIRS program. The findings lend support for the use of bonding and experiential approaches in other psychoeducational programs.

The studies reviewed here indicate PAIRS is associated with enhanced marital adjustment and satisfaction, intimacy, and conflict reduction and that such changes are both enduring and global to other relationships. Of course, the methodological limitations of the studies described in this chapter, including the correlational nature of the findings, should also be considered. The research findings are limited in other respects, such as sample demographics and the limited range of socioeconomic status. Additional research and verification of the findings should include diverse populations and use of controlled longitudinal designs.

PAIRS: Based on Wisdom and Science

Although the PAIRS program teaches relationship skills, PAIRS goes beyond the typical conceptualization of listening and problem solving. The PAIRS course is set apart by being built around the framework of The Relationship Road Map, which was first called the Road to Happiness by Daniel Casriel (1983) and was then expanded by Lori Gordon to be called the Relationship Road Map. The Relationship Road Map organizes the application of numerous activities in the PAIRS program and is conceptually structured by an affective-behavioral-cognitive model that suggests emotions have logic to them. If emotional pain is anticipated, we do everything we can to avoid it. If emotional pleasure is anticipated, we seek it. In PAIRS, we teach that emotional pleasure, achieved through bonding, has two essential elements: confiding (emotional openness) and physical closeness. This core theoretical base is congruent with recent findings in research on intimate relationships (Gottman, 1997; Johnson, 1997) suggesting that healthy relationships include affection, companionship, compassion, and sexual attraction while minimizing domination, control and power struggles, anger and resentment.

Commitment to Excellence

As an organization, the PAIRS professional community is vigilant about ethical conduct of its leaders. Being explicit about standards, engaging in education about those standards, and being devoted to a process of continual revision are major features of the PAIRS Foundation. The goal is to have PAIRS participants receive a thorough, pleasant experience that is facilitated by the ethical, professional conduct of the PAIRS leaders. While most PAIRS leaders are mental health professionals whose conduct should be guided by the ethical standards of their profession, the PAIRS Foundation has established its own ethical standards that focus on the unique aspects of teaching PAIRS programs.

Selected Publications

Berger, R & Hannah, M.T. (1999) Preventive Approaches to Couples Therapy. Philadelphia: Taylor & Francis.

DeMaria, R. (1993) Integrating marriage enrichment and marital therapist: A case study of PAIRS a contemporary psychoeducational marital intervention program. Families, 6, 42-59. (Published by the Family Institute of Philadelphia.

DeMaria, R. (1998). A national survey of married couples who participate in marriage enrichment; Satisfaction, couple type, divorce potential, conflict styles, attachment patterns, and romantic and sexual satisfaction of married couples who participated in a marriage enrichment program. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Bryn Mawr College, Bryn Mawr, PA.

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Gordon, L. (1984). P.A.I.R.S. Unpublished manuscript.

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