Couples Enrichment Weekend Workshop

DP 011 - Developmental Intervention

By

Barbara Beach-Sallaway and Robert W. Calhoun

Reformatted Fall 2003

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Preface

The Couples Enrichment Weekend Workshop is designed for University couples who are committed to improving upon an already satisfying relationship. The workshop strongly emphasizes communication as well as negotiation skill building. It is designed to allow couples to examine various areas of their relationship while improving upon their quality of communication of thoughts and feelings to one another.

The format relies to a great extent on peer facilitation and feedback. In many exercises, two couples work together supporting each other's efforts and giving corrective feedback when appropriate. The workshop designers feel that a most valuable learning experience for participants is observing and receiving feedback from peer couples.

Some of the concepts and exercises used in the design of this workshop have been taken in part from the "Relationship Enhancement Group for Couples," by Michael Baum, 1976, Counseling-Psychological Services Center, a revision and adaptation of the "Married Student Couples Workshop," developed in 1970 at Colorado State University by Mary Moore and John Hinckle.

11/3/1978
Couples Enrichment Weekend Workshop: Overview

Friday Evening: Session One

Introduction

Goal Setting

Communication Skills Training

Saturday Morning: Session Two

Individuality

Separateness

Saturday Afternoon: Session Three

Intimacy

Contracting for Change

Conflict Resolution

Saturday Evening: Session Four

Wrap-up

Evaluation

Appendix A: Preliminary Goalsetting Worksheet

Appendix B: Intimacy Checkup

Appendix C: Fight Style

Selected Readings for Couples
Friday Evening: Session One

A. Introduction: 7:00–8:00

1. Welcome: brief overview.

2. Introductions: Leaders introduce each other first. Mates then introduce their partners.

3. Overview of workshop and needed information: Schedule, themes, breaks, bathrooms. Leaders also mention issues about being in a group, such as confidentiality, feelings of anxiety, etc.

4. Warm-up: ask participants the following questions:
   a. What’s the best thing that could happen this weekend?
   b. What are you afraid might happen?
   c. What do you think you might do which would keep you from getting what you say you want to get from the weekend (how will you sabotage getting what you want to get)?

5. Assertiveness. Ask for what you want from the group, ask for what you want from your mate.

B. Goal-Setting: 8:00–8:45

1. Objective. The purpose of this exercise is for mates to focus on realistic goals for the weekend. What could you congratulate each other on having accomplished when you leave on Saturday evening?

   (Option: You may want to have couples fill out the goal-setting form prior to the beginning of the workshop. See Appendix A.)

2. Setting goals. Ask each individual to write down on a sheet of paper what his or her goal is for the weekend. Have group members state the goal in behavioral terms if possible. Then ask each couple to meet and discuss the goals that they have written out and come up with a goal together that they can agree upon.

3. Goal writing. Have couples join up together, two couples each, and discuss their stated goals, and have each couple write down on a large piece of newsprint their goal in behavioral terms. Couples help each other clarify, define their goal for the
weekend. It may be helpful to ask the question: How will we know you have reached your goal by the end of the weekend?

4. Process. Put newsprint on the wall when completed. Draw general comments from the group. Leaders give any necessary feedback as to what is realistic and what is not realistic as goals for the weekend.

**C. Communication Skills: 8:45–9:45**

1. Nonverbal exercise. This will be a quick exercise in which we will ask one member of each couple to be the listener and one member of each couple to be the speaker. The listeners will be told to listen in some non-facilitative ways. We will ask the speakers to talk about something of concern to them.

   (You may want to substitute this exercise with one in which the participants practice "I" messages.)

2. Positive communications. Using the above exercise as a starting point, draw from the group ideas about positive communication. Write down on the blackboard their ideas about positive communications for partners. "How do you feel when communicating well? What are positive verbal and nonverbal behaviors in good communication?"

   (Leaders may want to include important behavior not volunteered by the group.)

3. Communication exercises.

   a. Couples break into pairs and are labeled Couple 1 and Couple 2. One couple will choose to discuss a topic while the other couple will observe. The role of the observing couple will be to coach and give constructive feedback related to positive communication ideas as listed on the blackboard.

   b. Expressing something positive to your mate. Each mate in Couple 1 will express something positive to their partner. The partner is to listen and to paraphrase what his or her mate has said. The partners also gives feedback to their mates as to how it makes them feel to hear what their mate just said.

   After both members of Couple 1 have shared something positive with their mate, the observing couple will then give any feedback they feel is necessary. At that point, the couples change roles, the observing couple now becomes the couple expressing feelings to one another, and the couple which originally expressed feelings now becomes the observing couple.
c. Couples now change around so that they are working with a new couple. The exercise as explained in point b above is repeated. This time the couples will discuss something of more depth. This may include discussion about the goal that they have set for the weekend, the process they usually go through in making decisions together, something of meaning that happened to them that has some emotional impact or some other aspect about their relationship. (Note: Topics suggested may depend on sophistication of the group.)

9:45 Break for the evening: comments, reactions, and other feedback.
Saturday Morning: Session Two

A. Warm-up: Sharing enjoyable experiences: 9:30-10:00

1. Objective: To reinforce communication skills and focus on need for individuality.

2. Exercise: Break-off into couples. Each couple decides on one thing the pair enjoys doing together, or a very enjoyable experience they have shared which they would like to share with the group. When each couple has decided on something to share the couples report to the large group their enjoyable experience.

3. (Optional exercise: Ask each participant what individual activity is most enjoyable to them. You may want to omit this unless the first part of this section goes very quickly.)

B. Separateness/Individuality: 10:00–11:15

1. Objective: To appreciate the differences within couples.

2. Leaders briefly discuss the exercise and its rationale.

3. Exercise.

   a. Men form a circle, women observing from an outer circle. Men discuss what makes them unique, separate, or different from anyone else, including spouse or mate. Allow men to talk among themselves for 15 to 20 minutes. Male leader joins group and helps keep group on task. There is no interaction with outer circle until Step b. below.

   b. Female leader starts discussion with women regarding how they felt hearing their mate or spouse talk about his individuality. Men then respond.

   c. Reverse the process. Women form a circle and speak about their individuality.

   d. After the women have finished, men respond as to how they felt listening to their mate and the women in general. Then the women in the group respond.
4. Group process of the above exercise. Elicit feedback from the group as to their general reactions to the exercise. Points to consider in this discussion include the following:

   a. We often see partners as extensions of ourselves.
   b. We often only see our partners through glasses of our own expectations; in other words, we don’t see their weakness or their strength.
   c. We don’t often see our mate interact on their own with others.
   d. This discussion should also include the idea about the need for separateness within a relationship, and the cyclical pattern of intimacy.

**C. Within couple process time: 11:15–11:45**

1. Have couples discuss whether or not they feel they are getting enough individual or separate time within their relationship. Have couples discuss their need for time together and time apart. Define terms.

2. Have couples discuss by themselves any other reaction they have had to the morning exercises.

3. Optional exercise: Sculpting. Leaders will ask couples to (1) sculpt in a non-verbal way how they feel when they want to be alone or feel shut-off or shut-down from their partner, and (2) sculpt how they react when their partner feels shut-down or wants to be alone. Each couple will be allowed to sculpt their reactions to each other. After each couple has had a chance to do their own sculpting, the group will get together and process the exercise.

**D. Group sharing time. 11:45–12:00**

This is a time to gather together and share reflections on the morning and discuss plans for the afternoon.

**12:00- 1:15 Lunch Break**
Saturday Afternoon: Session Three

A. Intimacy and contract for change: 1:15–3:00

Note: Leaders may choose to reverse the order of exercises in the afternoon, saving the Intimacy section follow the Conflict Resolution Section.

1. Objective: The goal for this period of the workshop is for couples to review various ways, they do or do not interact intimately and experience a contracting process by which they can make changes in their interactions.

2. Optional Warm-up exercises.
   a. Foot massage. Leaders will briefly describe massage as one form of intimacy and describe simple massage techniques for a foot massage. Couples will then alternately massage their partner’s feet.
   b. Childhood sharing exercise. Have couples share with one another a particular age as a child (e.g. eight years old). Discuss what felt best about that time and what felt worst about that time. What did they like doing, what was exciting for them? What was traumatic or painful during that time? What were their nicknames? An alternative way of doing this is to ask each partner to take their partner back to a place of their childhood and talk about it and what it was like.

3. Intimacy checklist exercise. Leaders will hand out intimacy checklists to each couple. (See appendix B) Couples will be asked to mutually fill out the intimacy inventory.

   After some discussion within couples, each couple will choose one area on the list about which they wish to talk and have a desire for change. Because of the variety of types of intimacy on the inventory, this will allow couples to choose the level of disclosure they wish to have with the group. Leaders may need to describe what is meant by intimacy and the various types of intimacy as described on the inventory. The idea of intimacy is often very vague and general to couples. It may be a new idea for them that there are many different ways to be intimate with their partner.
4. Contracting for change.

Contracting instructions. Leaders will briefly discuss contracting for change. The following steps will be outlined on the board:

a. Clarifying the issue. Make sure you are talking about the same thing. Move for specificity and keep at one issue at a time.

b. Specify the request for change. Make it a positive request. Have the listener clarify the request. Have the listener state his/her willingness to work on the request and their feeling about it.

c. The contract itself. This should include frequency of requested behavior, a re-negotiation time (week, two weeks, one day, etc.), and the rewards for completing the contract. Rewards could include:

   i. Self rewards: if you fulfill the contract reward yourself with something or some activity that is pleasurable to you, but also is not negative to your mate.

   ii. Reward for partner: think of something you will do for your partner if he or she fulfills the contract. Make it positive so that withholding it would not be aversive. Also, it should not be related to your part of the contract.

d. Write down the contract and sign it. (Optional)

Note: Warning about contracting. Both partners should be asked to make a change in their behavior. Changes should be independent of each other.

5. Have couples work with other couples with whom they have not worked.

a. Two couples meet together with one couple negotiating to change the behavior they have agreed to talk about from the intimacy inventory. The observing couple’s role is to give feedback about their communication style as learned in earlier exercises, and to help the couple follow the contracting instructions if they need the help. The observing couple may also want to help the contracting couple by writing down the contract they’ve agreed upon.

b. After the first couple has completed their contracting, couples exchange roles with the observing couple now doing the contracting.
c. Process. Leaders lead a discussion concerning the couples’ reactions to the intimacy and contracting exercise. Leaders ask what couples have learned from this process. Discuss briefly how this model of negotiating for change can be applied to other areas in their relationship.

Break: 3:00–3:15

B. Conflict resolution: How to fight fairly: 3:15–6:00

Note: Leader may choose to reverse the order of exercises in the afternoon. He or she may choose to have participants do the Conflict Resolution exercises right after lunch, followed by the Intimacy and Contracting for change section at 3:15.

1. Objective: To focus on intimate nature of fighting and ways to handle anger, frustration, and disagreement.

2. Optional warm-up exercise: As a way to energize the group you may:
   a. involve couples in a push-pull exercise,
   b. have them fight with balloons,
   c. have them engage in a yes-no verbal exercise, or
   d. have them fight with a pillow.

3. Discussion:
   a. Briefly discuss concept of anger and fighting, emphasize that constructive fighting is made up of the components of clear communication, negotiation, problem solving behavior and empathy. Identify various things one might be fighting about. For example: Do I just want to be heard and understood, or is there some behavior of my mate’s that I want to request he or she change?
   b. Fight style profile (See appendix C). Hand out profiles and have people familiarize themselves with the terms. (Leaders may want to model role play a couple breaking the rule or ask for volunteers to role play someone breaking the rule and then repeat the role play having them follow the rule correctly.)
4. Conflict resolution exercise.

a. Break off into groups of two couples each. One couple discusses an unresolved conflict as the second couple observes and gives feedback on conflict resolution style. The observing couple may want to use the fight style profile to help them identify problems the couple may have in conflict resolution.

b. After about 20–30 minutes, have couples switch groups and form new couple groups. Observers now work at resolving conflict, while those couples who have just worked on conflict resolution will play the role of the observers.

c. Depending on the amount of time you want to invest on this exercise, you may wish to keep couples switching until you feel couples have had enough or your time has run out.

d. As couples process within the small groups, you may suggest a number of questions to help them structure their feedback:

- Are you farther along now then you were when you started?
- If not, what kept you from getting further toward resolution?
- If yes, what did you do that helped you get where you are now?

5. Group process time. Come together as a group to discuss reactions to the exercise. Share with each other any victories, and identify those behaviors most helpful in resolving conflict.

Break: 6:00–6:15
C. Wrap-up: 6:15–7:15

1. Fill out evaluation. You may have a formal evaluation for them to fill out, or you might ask couples to answer the following questions on a separate piece of paper:

   a. What was the most helpful experience of the weekend? and Why?

   b. What was the most helpful experience of the weekend? Why?

   c. What would you have changed or added to the weekend?

   d. Give some feedback on the leaders.

2. Group feedback.

   a. Have couples look again at their original goals. Discuss whether or not those goals have been reached.

   b. Discuss what has been learned and how, or by what means was it learned. In other words, what can they as individuals and couples take with them that will be applicable to their relationship and its enrichment.

   c. What are the goals that they have for themselves when leaving the workshop?

   d. Discuss resources: Further counseling, groups, books, telephone tapes, etc.
Appendix A Preliminary Goalsetting Worksheet

I. Go off by yourself and begin thinking of behavior change goals which you feel important and relevant to enhancing and improving the relationship between you and your partner. You might begin by asking the question, "What things do you desire to have happen to you in relation to your partner as a result of participating in this workshop."

List at least four or five ideas for goals below.

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.

II. Out of this list, choose the two most important goals and list them below in order of their importance to you.

Goal 1
Goal 2

III. Now let’s see if these two goals can be (or need to be) stated in more behavioral or specific terms.

1. Goal 1: Answer the following questions about Goal 1 in the space below.

   A. What would I be doing with my partner if I were accomplishing my goals?
B. What specific things would I be saying to my partner while I was accomplishing my goal?

C. How would I be feeling inside as I’m doing and saying what my goal entails?

D. In what situation(s) or circumstance(s) would I be accomplishing my goal?

2. Goal 2: Answer the same questions about Goal 2 in the space below.

A. What would I be doing with my partner if I were accomplishing my goal?

B. What specific things would I be saying to my partner while I was accomplishing my goal?

C. How would I be feeling inside as I’m doing and saying what my goal entails?

D. In what situation(s) or circumstances would I be accomplishing my goal?
IV. Which of your two goals do you think have the greatest possibility of accomplishing as a result of this workshop?

Goal ___________________________________________________

Why?
Appendix B: Intimacy Checkup

*Instructions: After discussing each area, check the blanks that apply to your relationship.*

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### Appendix C: Fight Style

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**Here and Now**

- Past Issues (Old Garbage)

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**Helpful (Problem Solving)**

- Hurtful (Blaming)

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**Behavioral Specific**

- General Personality Traits

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**Respect for Other Opinion or Feelings**

- Discounting

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**"I"Statements**

- "You"Statements

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**Win/Win Attitude**

- Win/Lost Attitude
Selected Readings for Couples

(Publishing information added August 2000)


