

WITHIN
My Reach[™]

Instructor Manual

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Within My Reach[™]

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Within My Reach Includes core strategies from PREP® (e.g., Markman, Stanley, Blumberg, Jenkins, & Whitel, 2004, 12 Hours to a Great Marriage); teaching, insights and strategies based on Marline Pearson's years of work teaching teens and young adults about relationship risks and strategies for lowering risks; concepts and strategies based on Scott Stanley's research and work on commitment; concepts, risk models, and strategies based on the research program of Scott Stanley, Galena Kline, and Howard Markman in the area of couple development; and many other strategies and themes based on relevant research and expertise as identified throughout the materials.

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OVERVIEW TO *Within My Reach*[™]

Introduction

by Scott M. Stanley

What is *Within My Reach*? It is a relationship skills and decision making program for helping individuals achieve their goals in relationships, family, and marriage from PREP. While the curriculum is especially tailored for those who have struggled with economic disadvantage, many elements of it would be quite applicable for various groups of adults who are attending a marriage or relationship education class without a partner.

There are two fundamental premises to this curriculum. The first is that virtually all people have aspirations for relationships that are happy, healthy, and stable—and that these aspirations are most often expressed in terms of a desire for success in marriage. The material assumes that the aspiration for lifelong love is natural and universal, however, there is no assumption that a participant is currently in a relationship at all or in one that is either healthy or one that they desire to have continue into the future and maybe on into marriage.

The second fundamental rationale of the program is expressed in this one statement by co-author Marline Pearson: “Your love life is not neutral.” Put another way, the decisions one makes in romantic attachments will affect the possibility of success in every other aspect of life—especially in child rearing and employment. Success in life on virtually every dimension depends on success, or at the very least, the absence of high danger or derailment of personal goals due to problems in personal relationships.

Taken together, the this new curriculum is designed to improve the chances for participants to attain relationship success for themselves and their children by:

- (1) helping those in viable relationships to cultivate, protect, and stabilize their unions, and to marry if desired;
- (2) helping those in damaging relationships to leave safely; and/or
- (3) helping those desiring a romantic relationship to choose future partners wisely.

Additionally, the curriculum is designed to help anyone, regardless of their goals or needs in romantic relationships, to develop useful skills in relationships more generally that may benefit them on the job, in the neighborhood, with children, and with family.

Sources of Input for Within My Reach

Many people have worked on bringing this new curriculum together. While this work incorporates elements of prior work of many people involved, it is truly the largest single new effort to create a curriculum for a specific use that we at PREP have undertaken in over a decade. The work included so many people with wonderful expertise that it is important to mention the fact so that you, the instructor, will understand some of what has gone into the ideas and strategies of the work.

Those that have helped us bring this work together fall in a number of key categories. The first category is consultants. These are people who have provided ideas, input, and suggestions based on their research or experience. The second category are those who work in or with program sites, and who provided “insider” information and ideas about both concepts and also feasibility and needs of sites with regard to the curriculum. The third category is the broadest, and refers to those who have provided very valuable information in the form of feedback and advice, but who were less in the role of consultant and more in the role of people being willing to give us their insights and knowledge for us to do with as we saw fit. As such, they were less involved directly in helping shape content, but nevertheless, their feedback may and often was immensely important in us refining or improving it.

Before listing those who have played a role in helping us develop these materials, we would note that PREP for Individuals, Inc. assumes all responsibility for the final content of the curriculum. We have taken the superb feedback of these folks, gladly, and acted on it, but the fact that any of these folks have given such feedback to us does not imply their endorsement or other allegiance on their part. What they have done was be willing to share their wisdom and insights, and what we have done is hopefully be wise enough to fully benefit from those insights as we built Within My Reach.

These are people for whom our thanks cannot be expressed clearly or strongly enough.

Consultants

Kathryn Edin

A sociologist, Dr. Edin is among the preeminent scholars of our time who focuses on the relationship and family dynamics of those in poverty. The publication of her book—with Maria Kefalas, called *Promises I Can Keep*—is a watershed moment in helping others understand the unique (and at times, not so unique) forces shaping the family dynamics of many in America today. She is a sociologist who's passion for those in poverty extended to her own decision—with her family—to live within the poorest communities for several years as she conducted her ethnographic research to better understand the lives of those she so passionately cares about.

Dr. Edin's influence throughout this curriculum was very substantial. She was present at our initial meetings in Oklahoma where we determined the most important themes for the core curriculum to cover, and she was heavily involved in helping us shape the major themes and strategies of the curriculum from start to finish. She confirmed when we were on the right track, helped wave us off less useful paths, and helped make every major idea better and clearer.

George Young

Rev. George Young, Sr., MA, M. Div, is Senior Pastor at Holy Temple Baptist Church in Oklahoma City and a Board Certified Chaplain by the Association of Professional Chaplains. In addition, he is a Clinical Member to the Association for Clinical Pastoral Education. He completed a Merrill Fellowship with Harvard Divinity School in 1966 and works extensively with the Oklahoma Marriage Initiative in promoting the institution of marriage and strengthening the bonds of communication between husband, wife and family. Pastor Young is also a trustee and an Adjunct Professor at Phillips Theological Seminary.

Rev. Young has extensive experience in community development, including work with a variety of economically disadvantaged groups. He has also worked for years to take best practice materials in relationship and marriage education to those who seldom have exposure to such services, such as in housing communities, economic development settings, and TANF classes. Rev. Young provided key input at numerous steps in the development of *Within My Reach*. He was able to lend his ideas and expertise to this project in ways that enhanced the relevance and impact on those for whom the material was most designed to be effective.

Women Who Have Been There

Marline Pearson has been teaching classes of women and men who are similar to one of the major audiences for this work, TANF recipients, those with very similar backgrounds, and various other adults of many backgrounds, for many years. Many of these individuals she has taught have remained in touch with her as they have progressed with their lives. As part of our process here, she gathered together a group of four women who provided regular, substantial feedback on the ideas as they were coming together in this curriculum. These women also helped write or refine many of the scenarios such as unrealistic expectations or the risks of sliding vs. deciding that are used in activities in the program. The themes for reaction and discussion in many of the activities are very real because they are, well, very real.

Input Based on Special Expertise

Anne Menard, Michael Johnson, and Others: Domestic Violence

A number of people who have been deeply involved in working in domestic violence advocacy or research on domestic violence have given us a great deal of detailed feedback on our domestic violence strategies and messages here. As noted above, the publisher PREP for Individuals, Inc. takes full responsibility for the content of this curriculum, nevertheless, we have done the best job we know how to do to anticipate the safety needs of the clients for this curriculum.

Many experts have taken the time to give us their well considered ideas and suggestions, and the strategies we put forth here are much stronger for the quality of their feedback. Numerous domestic violence advocates not specifically named here have provided input to this work. In addition, national domestic violence advocacy leader Anne Menard and the domestic violence researcher Michael Johnson of Pennsylvania State University have both provided a great deal of detailed, immensely valuable advice to us. We thank them, and all those giving us detailed feedback on this sensitive area (such as Kathy Edin), for their efforts on behalf of helping more people become safe.

Kristin Seefeldt: Respect and Dignity

Kristin Seefeldt of the University of Michigan has worked extensively with economically disadvantaged people for many years. Her role in evaluating a variety of programs has given her extensive experience and insight about the lives and experience of those who struggle with poverty. She is passionate about importance of respecting the dignity and worth of all, and that these values be conveyed through and within programs designed to serve those in poverty. We asked her to read through many key units of this curriculum to both give us any general feedback she felt compelled to offer and specifically to highlight any places where we may have erred in inadvertently conveying less respect for the client than would be our desire. Her feedback was superb and very useful.

Program and Policy Personnel Lending Input and Insights

Tony Russell

Tony Russell works for the Oklahoma Marriage Initiative, and among various duties, has been extensively involved in coordinating activities with program sites that work with TANF recipients. He has been immensely helpful to the development of this curriculum in that he helped coordinate many different types of meetings with providers and stakeholders in OK that helped us refine our focus on the needs of the client in developing the curriculum. As such, he played a crucial role (and will likely continue to do so) in being a liaison between the prototypical client (Oklahoma Department of Human Services) and our team building the new curriculum. This is of immense value because such a work needs to serve the needs of both the participants in the classes as well as the program administrators who have objectives such a curriculum is designed to help them reach.

Mr. Russell also took the lead in gathering data on TANF class participants about their relationships that proved useful in planning this curriculum as well as for the needs of OMI to understand the population they are serving in this regard. Further, he coordinated two pilot classes for testing the new curriculum in May of 2005, one in Oklahoma City and one in Poteau Oklahoma. These pilots were immensely valuable in the validation and refinement of the curriculum. Mr. Russell understands the needs of the sites well, and he made sure we had what we needed to understand those needs in building the new curriculum for clients like the Oklahoma Department of Human Services.

Educators in Various Roles Working with Lower Income Clients in Oklahoma

Various thoughtful persons have successfully used earlier, couple based versions of PREP as they have adapted it for use with lower income couples/individuals (and fragile families), and we have benefited from their experiences over the years. We have interviewed frontline providers in the Health Department, Extension Services, and Department of Human Services (TANF class related) in Oklahoma with regard to their experiences using PREP materials with economically highly disadvantaged clients. This has provided us valuable information on what works well and what seems less useful. We received extensive feedback on the use of PREP from the following people who had been using these concepts in their work with low income clients in Oklahoma: Pam Varner (Extension Services, Stevens County), Ronda Archer (Department of Human Services, TANF services, Stevens County), Alesha Lilly, Ph.D. (Oklahoma State Department of Health, Child Guidance Service), and Teresa Baird, Ph.D. (Oklahoma State Department of Health, Child Guidance Service).

These individuals gave us considerable time and input based on their own extensive experiences, including in the use of PREP materials in their settings. Other practitioners participating in the Oklahoma Marriage Initiative have provided input on all manner of subjects relevant to serving low income populations. Most specifically, a group in the Guidance Division of the Oklahoma City County Health Department wrote a document about adapting the PREP curriculum to TANF class participants. Their insights were thoughtful and useful. The authors of that document are: Lois Pokorny, Ph.D., Sharon Wilson, M.Ed., LPC, LMFT, and Pam Collins, M.Ed., LPC, LMFT.

In the Fall of 2004, we met with two instructors in TANF orientation classes who had been noted by the Oklahoma Marriage Initiative to have been innovative in their relationship and marriage education efforts using elements of PREP. Those instructors were Carla Jenkins with Oklahoma State Dept of Health and Hazel Kesner, now Retired. They provided very specific and valuable feedback to Scott Stanley, Kathy Edin, Tony Russell, Galena Kline, and Kendy Cox related to the task we had set out to accomplish of building a curriculum that was highly tailored to the needs of lower income individuals related to their relationships.

Background Research and Expertise

There are a number of policy and research experts who have done an exceptional job of illuminating key issues that affect those in poverty relative to their family relationships and aspirations for—and access to—marriage. You will note a good deal of coverage here of research on low income groups that we make liberal use of to give you a framework from that perspective on your work with low income people. Importantly we also owe a debt to the growing number of scholars whose work studying low income clients, couple relationships in “fragile families,” and so forth has been very useful to us; people whose work we cite throughout this document, including Sara McLanahan, Marcia Carlson, Kathy Edin, Theodora Ooms, Andrew Cherlin, Linda Burton, David Fein, Robin Dion, Pamela Smock, Wendy Manning, Ron Mincy, Kristin Seefeldt, and their various colleagues.