Marital Satisfaction Increases After Participating in Married and Loving It!

The Situation
With marriages failing at a rate of nearly 50% and with young men postponing marriage until age 27 and young women until age 23, there is a great need for marriage education. Marriage education has been affective in strengthening marriages and lowering the divorce rate. Self declared unhappy couples preparing for divorce have become happily married couples after participating in marriage education programs.

Due to the transient nature of our society, many young couples do not have family role models living nearby to help nurture their marriage relationship. Couples who have married and divorced are looking for education so the same mistakes are not repeated in subsequent marriages. Pre-marital instruction and marriage education is offered by religious organizations, leaving a void for couples of different faiths and those not affiliated with any particular church or religious faith.

During childhood and teenage years the 4-H program, offered by the Extension System, provided unbiased research-based educational information. As adults it is natural for them to request the same unbiased research-based educational information from their local Extension Office. It is our responsibility to respond to their requests. When marriage relationships are healthy, family life and parenting improves and children are healthier, happier and do better academically.

Our Response
Married and Loving It!, a program designed to strengthen marriages by teaching relationship skills and by presenting the research findings about successful and happy marriages was developed in 2000. Married and Loving It! consists of five classes that are taught one night a week for five consecutive weeks, lasting 2 hours each night. Class titles are: Communication, Finances: Freedom or Fiasco?, Madly in Love, Conflict: For Better or For Worse?, and Marriage…A Daily Affair. The program highlights research by David and Amy Olsen, John Gottman, Gary Chapman, Nick Stinnett, and John DeFrain. To encourage perfect attendance, a free night’s lodging at a local hotel is given away at random to a couple with perfect attendance. Every time Married and Loving It! has been offered in Bonneville County the class has been full and a waiting list has been established for the next offering.
Program Outcomes

A telephone survey was conducted by the Social Science Research Unit with the University of Idaho. The results are from 110 completed surveys of Married and Loving It! participants. Ninety-eight percent were satisfied or very satisfied with the program. The study indicated that 78% were seeking changes in their marriage. The topics that made the biggest difference in their marriage relationship were communication (60%) and conflict resolution (18%).

Since taking Married and Loving It!
- 92% were satisfied or very satisfied with how clearly they communicate with their spouse.
- 92% were satisfied or very satisfied with the way they express love to their spouse.
- 92% were satisfied or very satisfied with their decision making abilities.
- 93% were satisfied or very satisfied with their ability to identify sources of anger.
- 84% were satisfied or very satisfied with their methods of resolving issues.
- 39% have improved or greatly improved their financial situation.
- 68% improved or greatly improved their ability to meet the needs of their spouse.

When asked to rate their marital satisfaction before taking the program, 66% indicated they were satisfied or very satisfied; 34% indicated they were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied. The response for marital satisfaction rate during the program was 90% satisfied or very satisfied, and immediately after was 92% satisfied or very satisfied. When asked to rate their marital satisfaction since participating in the program, 93% indicated they were satisfied or very satisfied and 7% indicated they were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied. Seventy five percent of the respondents had participated in Married and Loving It! one to three years prior to the survey.

The Married and Loving It! curriculum was published in CD format during 2004 and made available during concurrent sessions at the international Smart Marriages Conference and at the annual conference of the National Extension Association of Family and Consumer Sciences. Married and Loving It! has received two national awards and one regional award.

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