

Marriage in Today's World – 43:30 Outline & Mentality - Common Protestant Outline

Objective

To have the couples explore their marital relationship with each other by identifying loneliness in their relationship, understanding that periods of disillusionment are normal, and realizing that even when they are disillusioned they can still make the decision to love.

Goals of this presentation

To know

- the world's training for marriage leads them to live separate and isolated lives
- periods of romance and disillusionment are present in every marriage/vocation
- to love or to be loved is a decision unrelated to our feelings; it is a conscious daily choice
- reaching the stage of joy is the result of making daily decisions to love or to be loved

To do

- identify the external and internal pressures on their relationship
- recall their expectations for marriage
- write their reflections as love letters

To experience

- the pain of disillusionment
- hope

Flow of the presentation

We begin Marriage in Today's World by sharing how the world influences our marriage. Through our personal examples, we help the couples to relive the romance stage of their marriage. We continue by looking at the expectations we had entering marriage and the disappointments that resulted. Then we share how our feelings of disappointment and loneliness influence our attitudes and behaviors and how those attitudes and behaviors lead us to live a "married singles" lifestyle. We share the deep disillusionment of our marriage. We tell the couples how to break out of the downward spiral of disillusionment. We give the couples hope that they can reach the stage of joy in their marriage by making the decision to love and to be loved. The Clergy leader shares these stages in his/her call to ministry.

Connection with other presentations

Marriage in Today's World builds on the preceding presentations. In order to communicate during times of disillusionment, it is essential that couples have an understanding of how to share feelings as taught in the first presentation of the Marriage Encounter experience. From Encounter with Self, we continue to see the effect of our attitudes and behaviors on our spousal relationship. Marriage in Today's World and God's Desire for Marriage help us to look at the decisions we make in our daily lives, and how these decisions impact our spousal relationships. The "married singles" lifestyle is contrasted in this presentation with the radical lifestyle in God's Desire for Marriage. The concept of "to love is a decision" will be necessary for the couples to listen actively in Listening, to talk about their feelings in sensitive areas of their

relationship in Areas for Reaching Out to Each Other, and to trust and risk to share their deepest feelings in Risking to Trust in Dialogue. The introduction of the love letter provides a tender vehicle for communicating their feelings for the rest of the Marriage Encounter program and for their continuing journey when they return home.

Cautions:

1. There is a danger in being too absolute in this presentation, particularly in describing our deep disillusionment. We give a fair evaluation of our marriage, but not to the point of exaggeration. We don't want to sound as though our marriage was black (which it wasn't) and is now white (which it isn't).
2. If we describe seemingly insurmountable problems in our marriage, the couples may stop listening. If we, as presenters, display such problems, this can damage our credibility and break down their trust in us.

I. Introduction and optional opening prayer (LW: 0:30)

State:

This presentation is titled "Marriage in Today's World." It can be found on page _____ of the Workbook.

Opening prayer (optional).

Suggested wording:

Lord God, please be with us as we explore our attitudes and behaviors within our relationship. Help us to accept each other and to make daily decisions to love and to be loved, especially during times of disillusionment.

II. The world's plan for our marriage (Total time: 6:30)

II A. Personal expectations of marriage, including influences from family and friends (LH & LW and CL & CS: 1:00 each)

Transition statement – suggested wording by first speaker:

Most of us don't realize it, but society and the world around us have a plan for our marriage.

OR

Growing up, I never realized how much I was influenced by the world's plan for our marriage.

Share your expectations about marriage and the influences from your family, culture, neighborhood, etc. as you were growing up that you brought to your marriage.

Share what influenced your expectations about marriage, giving multiple examples from your culture, family history, beliefs, and judgments. It is important to incorporate the message, "I expected _____" into the sharings so that the contrast will be clear in III B 1. when you talk about your unmet expectations.

It might provide valuable insights for the couples if some of the expectations voiced by husband and wife contrast with each other. These contrasting expectations could then be explored in section III B 1. as unmet expectations in the early stage of disillusionment.

II B. General expectations of marriage, including influences from society and media (LH or LW: 1:00)

Share general expectations/influences that come from society and the media. Some examples to consider include: the influence of the internet, social networking sites, fashion, and lifestyle magazines; TV shows and reality shows; the acceptance of casual sex and infidelity; the perceptions that marriage is a business arrangement, that the world affirms us for living separate and independent lifestyles, and that marriage is disposable; and that 50% of all marriages fail.

NOTE:

Be certain that your examples are relatable to today's generation by constantly updating TV shows, online sites, and magazine titles mentioned (even if you do not watch/use/read those yourselves).

II C. Exercise on expectations (CL or CS: 1:30)

Introduce and guide the couples through the written exercise on page ___ of the Workbook. This is a personal reflection. Allow approximately one minute to write. The couples will not be asked to read what their spouse wrote at this time.

Question: What were my expectations of our life together when we married?

III. Stages of relationship (Total time: 11:00)

III A. Romance (First stage)

III A 1. Definition of Romance (LH or LW: 0:30)

Read as is:

Marriage cycles through three stages: romance, disillusionment, and joy. Romance, as we use it this Marriage Encounter experience, is the stage of our relationship when we focus on each other's positive qualities and behaviors. Romance includes those special times when we experience being loved and valued as a person.

III A 2. Sharing on stage of romance (LH & LW and CL & CS: 1:00 each)

Share the romance stage of your courtship and marriage. Do not share a detailed story of how you met and fell in love; rather focus on the qualities that attracted you to each other, for example, his/her kindness and attentiveness, his/her sense of humor, or caring nature, thoughtfulness, trustworthiness, etc.

In sharing the romance stage of your relationship, give brief examples that illustrate your initial attraction to each other. Also mention your early years of marriage, including your sexual relationship. This section will contrast to III B 1. when you describe how some of the same qualities you admired in your spouse during your romance stage became the source of annoyance and frustration later in your marriage. (CL holds references to romance stage of his/her call or vocation until section V C 3.)

Spouses should not be repetitive. Specific elements for the couples to include:

- Specific personal qualities that attracted you to your spouse
- Specific behaviors you found appealing during your courtship
- How you communicated as a couple (the ease, frequency, depth of your communication and attentive listening in your courtship and early marriage)
- The vibrancy of your sexual relationship (in your early marriage)
- Your positive attitudes and outlook for your marriage and future together

III A 3. Exercise: What attracted me to you? (CL or CS: 2:00 – time includes introduction, writing time, and sharing of answers)

Introduce and guide the couples through the written exercise on page _____. (Give them one minute to do the exercise.)

Ask them to read what their spouse wrote. Spouses briefly share with each other. (Give them 0:45 to share their answers.)

Question: What attracted me to you?

III B. Disappointments

III B 1. Sharing of disappointments over unmet expectations
(LH & LW and CL & CS: 0:45 each)

Each team member describes the beginning of your loneliness. Contrast your early disappointments with the examples of expectations shared in II A. and with the stage of romance shared in III A. Also contrast specific qualities or behaviors that once attracted you, but which are now annoying or even hurtful. Your focus should be on "me and my wants" and your unwillingness to appreciate a quality or behavior (generally one word) in your spouse that you regarded so highly during your courtship and early days of marriage.

CS includes some disappointments resulting from being married to a pastor; i.e., long hours, meetings, demands, emergencies changing plans, conflict in schedules, etc., but CL holds references to romance stage of his/her call or vocation until section V C 3.

Examples:

- “One of the qualities that first drew me to Sam was his sense of humor. But after being married for a while, his jokes began to annoy me. It seemed that they were often at my expense and I no longer found them amusing.”
- “When we dated, he brought me flowers, opened the door for me, but then I didn’t see a flower or a door held open for months/years.”
- “She used to leave me love notes in my lunch, but later they became reminders to get the milk on the way home or to pick up the kids from school.”

Your sharing should be concise and relatable. Your purpose is to capture the essence of your relationship as you began to experience discontent and sadness in your marriage. This will encourage the couples to examine the state of their own marriage. Do not delve into your loneliness and disappointment so completely that it undercuts the deep disillusionment shared in IV B, but it is important to identify and fully describe your feelings during this time in your marriage. Do not subtly accuse or blame your spouse for your feelings. Your sharing must be "I"-focused in describing your own judgments or perceptions, not pointing an accusing finger at your spouse.

III B 2. Unmet expectations and disappointments lead to changes in attitudes and behaviors (LH or LW: 1:30)

III B 2 a. Definition of attitudes

Read as is:

When our expectations are not met, disappointments begin to influence our attitudes and behaviors. An attitude is a developed pattern of thinking in which I take a position on specific ideas, issues, and people. An attitude is like looking through a filter I have formed in my mind. My attitudes are often focused on me and my own desires.

III B 2 b. Sharing of attitudes and behaviors resulting from unmet expectations

Share how these unmet expectations and disappointments left you with an attitude(s) of:

- indifference
- peace at any price
- self protection
- independence
- me first
- scorekeeping
- superiority
- other attitudes that are pertinent to your relationship

For each attitude that applies to your relationship, give an example of one or two of the behaviors that you started doing to compensate for what you perceived was missing in your marriage. What do you act like and sound like when you behave this way? What are you feeling? (If you refer back to your Dominant Personality Style, be careful not to “blame” it for your behavior) Be very specific in describing your attitudes and behaviors, as these may not be what the couples are used to examining in themselves.

NOTE:

Do not use the term “married singles” in your sharing, since you have not yet defined this term. This sharing is the lead-in to the concept of “married singles” in the next section.

Formation:

When the expectations we each had for our marriage are not met, we are bewildered and disappointed. We are not prepared to deal with our feeling of loneliness and sense of loss in the stage of disillusionment. Our first instinct is to protect ourselves. Although we may be fearful that we are somehow failing in our marriage, it is difficult to admit to ourselves or to talk about with our spouse. By compensation, we seek, consciously or subconsciously, to fill a void in our relationship. We may think we are more important, appreciated, or accepted by our friends or at work or in our parenting than we are in our marriage. We strive to compensate for what we perceive as lacking in our marriage by finding fulfillment outside our marriage relationship. We retreat back to attitudes and behaviors that are familiar and have worked, both in the present and in the past. These attitudes and behaviors tend to increase our self-worth and give us assurance that we are somehow successful in our life.

IV. The consequences (8:00 total)

IV A. Married singles attitudes and behaviors

(Other Lay spouse and CL or CS: 0:45 each)

Lay husband or spouse reads suggested transition (which can be adapted by CL or CS, if desired):

As you can see, a result of our disappointments is that we begin to live as married singles. The married singles lifestyle is thinking and acting in my marriage as if I were a single person.

The Lay spouse who did not share III B 2. and either the CL or CS share attitudes and behaviors which resulted from disappointments and feelings of loneliness. The examples in IV A will be similar to what was shared by the other spouse in III B 2. These should be realistic and relatable examples of living as “married singles” in action and underlying attitude. If you refer to your Dominant Personality Style, being careful not to “blame” it for such behavior. If CL is the one speaking here, he/she speaks only of marital relationship.

It is important to emphasize that it is our underlying attitude that encourages us to lead isolated, self-centered lives. Share how your hopes and dreams for your marriage are lessened in the process as time goes by and you lead more and more isolated lives. Your examples should focus on attitudes and behaviors, not just the activities. Tell the couples that the activities themselves are not bad or wrong. It is the underlying attitude that must be explored. Be aware that we can be married singles sitting side by side in the same room. It is important to share the story of your marriage in a chronological fashion, from your early romance, to unmet expectations, development of married singles attitudes and behaviors, and ultimately loneliness and disillusionment.

IV B. Disillusionment (Second stage)

IV B 1. Explain the downward spiral and define the stage of disillusionment (CL or CS: 0:30)

Read as is:

Living the married singles lifestyle inevitably leads to progressively deeper disillusionment.

A downward spiral occurs in a relationship when we don't experience the love and attention we expect. This might be subtle at first as we find we are getting more affirmation from other sources – job, school, clubs, friends, or children. In our busy lifestyles, we start taking our spouse for granted and may believe that we are being taken for granted. Small slights lead to arguments; sarcasm replaces compliments. We put distance between us, and moving apart begins to appear easier than facing our issues. A downward spiral that continues unchecked leads to the despair and deep loneliness that we call the stage of disillusionment. Married couples experience periods of disillusionment at one time or another as a result of living a married singles lifestyle.

IV B 2. Share personal examples of the deep loneliness in disillusionment (LH & LW and CL & CS: 1:30 each)

Share your own experience of being in the stage of disillusionment in your marriage. This follows the natural progression from the stage of romance, to unmet expectations, to married singles, and finally to your deep disillusionment and loneliness as a result of your choice to live a married singles lifestyle. Describe fully your deep feeling of loneliness during this time.

Elements to consider in your sharing:

- Describe the consequences that resulted from your attitudes and behaviors as married singles
- Describe your lost dreams, questioning "Is this all there is?"
- Describe the situation and the feelings you were experiencing at that time, which left you seeing yourselves trapped in disillusionment
- Your examples should be relatable and difficult to share as you recall the emptiness, lack of shared purpose, isolation, and lessened sexual passion
- Describe your fears and despair in thinking about the future
- Do not in any way blame your spouse for your disillusionment, as you chose the behaviors and attitudes that contributed to living a married singles lifestyle that brought you to this point
- Identify and fully describe your strongest feelings during this stage of disillusionment. Your powerful sharing of feelings will help the couples get in touch with their own deep feelings of loneliness, etc.
- End this section by icing the room with a description of your deep loneliness during this stage of disillusionment

You have only 1:30 each to share the deep loneliness which resulted from living a married singles lifestyle. There is no time to tell a long, detailed story. Our sharing of the stage of disillusionment is a natural progression from our romance, to unmet expectations, to married singles, and finally to our deep disillusionment. We are basically describing the consequences that resulted from everything we shared when describing our attitudes and behaviors as married singles. We identify and fully describe our feelings during this time in our marriage as we recall the emptiness, lack of shared purpose, isolation, and lessened sexual passion. However, we do not in any way blame our spouse for our disillusionment. We chose the behaviors and attitudes that contributed to living a married singles lifestyle that brought us to this point.

Cautions:

- Even though we may have felt hopeless, we do not depict our marriage as hopeless or imply that we no longer loved each other. Our despair in the stage of disillusionment is that we do love each other deeply, but have chosen behaviors that stifle our tenderness and intimacy. We have lost the sense of shared purpose and intimacy that were once a hallmark of our relationship.
- Do not use words or phrases such as "separation" or "close to divorce," which may be distracting for some couples. If this was our situation, we can use other phrases, such as "We weren't sure what would happen to our marriage."

- Most of us will feel exposed and vulnerable after sharing such an intense and private time in our marriage. We are re-experiencing the deep feelings we just described and may be tempted to ease our tension with levity or self-deprecating humor. Doing so shows a lack of respect for what many couples in the room may be experiencing, so it is important to avoid this temptation.
- After such a deep sharing of feelings, it is awkward to move immediately to section V, which introduces the concept of “to love is a decision.” The person who shares last may need time to compose him/herself. Certainly the couples in the room need a moment to absorb what was shared and reflect on how it relates to their own marriage. It’s entirely appropriate to pause briefly before continuing.

V. To love is a decision (Total time: 11:30)

V A. Explain “to love is a decision” (LH or LW: 1:30)

Suggested wording

It is normal to reach the stage of disillusionment at one time or another in our relationship. Fortunately, we learned some good news on our Marriage Encounter experience. We do not need to stay trapped in a downward spiral of disillusionment. We have the power to break out of disillusionment by making decisions to love or to be loved. Love is more than a spontaneous feeling that comes and goes. To love or to be loved can be a conscious decision.

***The decision to love** is an intentional choice not to react to my own feelings of anger, resentment, disappointment, and so on, but instead to respond to (my spouse)’s needs at that moment. Making the decision to love is deciding to love (my spouse) no matter what my feelings are.*

*In the same way, **the decision to be loved** is consciously letting go of my feelings of anger, resentment, or disappointment to accept the love that is being offered by (my spouse). I am not denying my own feelings, or giving in, or being a martyr. I am choosing behaviors that nourish and support our love for each other. My actions proclaim that **our relationship is more important than any issue or situation**. Making decisions to love and to be loved moves us out of the stage of disillusionment in our relationship.*

V B. Share how you strive to break out of the spiral (5:30)

V B 1. By making daily decisions to love and be loved

(LH & LW: 3:00)

One spouse focuses on the decision to love, while the other spouse focuses on the decision to be loved. Do not share on the same incident or example.

NOTE:

You have only 1:30 each here, so there is no time for long stories. The issue is not important; making the decision to love or be loved is what needs stressing.

Formation:

Making the decision to love or the decision to allow ourselves to be loved by our spouse may mean that we must choose behaviors that are difficult for us. It may require us to step outside our comfort zones. These decisions require a positive attitude. They can only be made when we look beyond the emptiness or loneliness of the present moment to the fullness of joy that God has promised. Decisions to love or be loved are not about compromise; they are acts of faith in what could be. We can make these decisions even when we are not arguing or out of sorts with each other. They could be positive steps we take because we want to communicate our love more fully or because we want a more tender relationship. We consciously and willingly humble ourselves to make our spouse's feelings more important than our own at that moment. Our decision to love or to be loved is about choosing behaviors that nourish and support our love for each other even if that means changing our behaviors, attitudes, or reactions for the sake of our relationship. When we make the decision to love, we deliberately and joyfully lay down our lives to try to love each other as Jesus loved, without conditions. Love is something we do, not something that happens to us.

V B 1 a. Making the decision to love

One spouse shares how you strive to break out of the spiral of disillusionment by making daily decisions to love. Give a simple, relatable example of a time when you made a decision to love, regardless of how you were feeling. Illustrate the process you went through.

Describe:

- the specific situation
- how you would have normally reacted
- how you decided to change your attitude or behavior in order to nurture your relationship

The decision to love could be a time when you momentarily set aside your own feelings to truly listen to your spouse, a time when you deliberately stepped outside your comfort zone of typical behaviors, or a time when you delayed your personal desires to be attentive and present to your spouse. Do not focus on a hearts-and-flowers, sentimental kind of love. You are making a decision to love your spouse for who they are, without expectations.

End with a couple of other quick relatable examples of typical “decisions to love” you might make.

V B 1 b. Making the decision to be loved

(Lay spouse who did not do a.)

The other Lay spouse gives a simple, relatable example of a time when you made a decision to be loved by your spouse when you otherwise might have closed yourself off. Illustrate the process you went through. Describe:

- the specific situation
- how you would have normally reacted
- how you decided to change your attitude or behavior in order to nurture your relationship

This decision to be loved might mean setting aside your self-doubts, critical self-judgments, attitudes of superiority, unmet expectations, or other barriers that stand in the way of receiving love from your spouse. It might have involved stepping outside your comfort zones of typical behaviors. End with a couple of other quick relatable examples of typical “decisions to be loved” you might make.

V B 2. By confronting for the sake of your relationship

(CL or CS: 2:30 includes 1:00 for exercise)

Transition statement's suggested wording:

When we argue or disagree, one of the decisions to love may be to confront each other for the sake of our relationship. This can be positive if we face issues together. Constructive confrontation can keep us open and honest and be life-giving for our relationship. We have guidelines to help. Please turn to page ____ and take a moment to read through these guidelines.

Allow approximately 1:00 for the couples to read the guidelines.

Elaborate on one guideline (pick from the list below) that is especially important to you. In your example, briefly share your attitudes or behaviors and how that specific guideline is important in your relationship. The example should be clear, concise, and personal.

NOTE:

Guidelines for confronting each other (as written in the Workbook) have been copied here for your ease of reference to write this section. (Do not read these aloud.)

1. Your relationship is more important than any issue or situation. Keep your discussion focused on each other and not on the issue. Confront for understanding, not to win.
2. Stay physically close, even though it may be difficult. A small gesture of affection can show caring. Eye contact also helps.
3. Don't bring in a third party. A parent, friend, or co-worker has no part in your confrontation. Even comparisons like “you're just like your mother” fuel the fire.
4. Finish the discussion; do not walk away no matter how hard it is to stay. This can be difficult, especially when you are exasperated, or want to avoid conflict. Tears are okay if they stem from vulnerability or frustration. Do not use tears as a weapon or to end confrontation. Be sensitive! If you cannot finish the discussion, make a commitment to come back to the issue later.
5. Avoid absolutes like “you always” or “you never.” Absolutes are rarely true.
6. Do not waste time placing blame. It only drives a wedge between you. Move forward and do not waste time looking back.
7. Avoid name calling and character assassination. Treat each other with respect and gentleness.
8. Avoid sarcasm and criticism. Both are hurtful and damage relationships.
9. Sometimes it's best to postpone the confrontation. For instance, one or both may be too tired, out of control, under the influence of alcohol or drugs, or looking for revenge.

V C. The result of making the decision to love is reaching the stage of joy (Third stage) (4:30)

V C 1. Definition of the stage of joy (CL or CS: 0:30)

Transition statement (read as is):

We have spoken about romance and disillusionment and how these stages affected our marriage. The third stage of relationship is the stage of joy. Changing our negative attitudes and behaviors, and choosing to make daily decisions to love and to be loved, are actions that can bring our relationship to the stage of joy. The stage of joy is defined as the mutual awareness that we are loved, cherished, honored, and respected for who we are, even with our flaws and imperfections.

V C 2. Sharing the stage of joy (CL or CS and LH or LW: 1:00 each)

CL or CS and then LH or LW describes the stage of joy in your marriage. Your sharing should be inviting, realistic, and joyful so the couples will want to strive for this stage in their own marriage.

Share how you reach out to each other and learn even deeper things about each other when you are in this stage of joy. Do not confuse the stage of joy in your relationship-with merely experiencing joyful, happy feelings. Share how making the decision to love or to be loved in your relationship breaks the cycle of romance and disillusionment and brings you to the “higher” stage of joy. Experiencing the stage of joy does not necessarily mean you have permanently “arrived.” All these stages will continue to cycle through your relationship, but reaching the stage of joy will help you learn to trust enough to make the decision to love and be loved day in and day out. This leads to shorter stages of disillusionment and longer stages of romance and joy. Follow any “teachy” explanations with a personal example – this is the only way to avoid repetition in this section between Clergy and Lay.

Formation:

Most relationships cycle through all three stages – romance, disillusionment, and joy – throughout our lives. Joy is a specific phase in our relationship when we have the confidence to reach out to each other by making decisions to love and to be loved, knowing, without a doubt, that we are accepted as we are and loved unconditionally. We do not get to the stage of joy overnight. We only experience the stage of joy when both spouses make repeated decisions to love and to be loved. These decisions break the downward spiral of disillusionment and build trust and intimacy.

Some couples have experienced only two stages in their relationship: romance and disillusionment. They may have gotten so used to living in the stage of disillusionment that they may not realize that there can be something more for their relationship. This presentation can help the couples discover that they can live more abundantly. Every couple has an opportunity to reach the stage of joy.

V C 3. How romance, disillusionment, and joy cycle through the call to ministry (CL: 2:00)

Suggested wording for transition

For me, there is another side of these three stages, and it deals with my call to ministry.

Describe your early romance with your call to ministry: What attracted you to ministry. What expectations did you have? You may focus on relationships with your congregation and close friends. This is about loving and appreciating the good points in your people and how they, in turn, seemed to love and appreciate you; e.g., early days when everybody loved your sermons, your prayer life was vibrant, your outlook for your vocation positive, you knew you were making a difference, etc. Then briefly touch on how unmet expectations gradually lead you from disappointment to disillusionment, including the loneliness you experienced. Share your attitude changes and decisions to love/to be loved that enabled you to break out of disillusionment to reach the stage of joy. You might end with something like: "As you have heard, both marriage and the call to ministry cycle through these three stages. In fact, all our deepest relationships do. It is only by making daily decisions to love and to be loved that we experience the stage of joy in our relationships."

VI. Preparation for dialogue (Total time: 6:00; LH & LW: A-C: 4:00; CL or CS: D: 2:00)

Recommendation: Personalize some of the teaching points below wherever appropriate and if time allows. You might insert your spouse's name when you can.

VI A. Ask them to write a love letter instead of a reflection

Suggested wording:

We are going to suggest a slight but important change for the remainder of the Marriage Encounter experience. From now on, rather than writing a reflection on the question, we want you to write your feelings and thoughts to your spouse in the form of a love letter. If you turn to page ___ you will see information on how to write a love letter.

VI B. What we mean by love letter

Suggested wording:

You may be thinking of hearts-and-flowers language from your courtship, but when we speak of love letters in Marriage Encounter, we are talking about offering a true gift of love to our spouse by sharing our deepest feelings, even when those feelings might not be sweetly romantic. Our feelings are the best expression of who we are, so when we share them with our spouse in a letter, whatever those feelings are, we are giving ourselves to our spouse. This is why we can write a love letter on any topic or area in our relationship, even areas or feelings that we may find awkward or difficult to talk about. This is a true gift of love.

We write our love letters in a natural, conversational way, as if we were speaking directly to each other. Many couples start their letters with a loving endearment, such as “Dear” or “Sweetheart.”

Do not worry about grammar or having to use the perfect word. It is far more important to reveal yourself as honestly and tenderly as possible through your feelings. Focus on your strongest feeling and describe it as completely as you can so that your spouse can experience it also.

Remember that feelings are spontaneous inner reactions to a person, place or situation. Accept how you feel without assigning blame, justifying or rationalizing.

Be sure to keep your focus on your spouse as you write. Trust in the goodness of your spouse and in your love for each other enough to give yourself as fully as you can in your love letter.

Finally, when reading your spouse’s love letter, accept it in the same spirit of love that it was given. Focus on trying to experience the feelings fully.

VI C. Briefly review the dialogue process

Suggested wording:

Let’s briefly review the dialogue process. First, we give you a question about your relationship. Then, you separate to write your love letter privately. Answer the question in two or three sentences to share your thoughts, then write down the feelings you associate with the question. As a reminder, on page __, there is a list to help you name your feelings.

Focus on your strongest feeling and describe it as completely as you can, using any or all of the techniques on page ____. Compare it with another time you may have had a similar feeling; describe it using your senses – sound, touch, sight, smell, and taste; express what your feeling makes you want to do; what physical sensation happens to you when you experience the feeling; how you would rate your feeling on a scale of 1-10.

After writing you meet and lovingly exchange your love letters, maybe with a kiss or hug. Read each other’s words twice: once for the head (focusing on the words), and once for the heart (focusing on the person behind the words).

For your verbal dialogue, choose the one strongest feeling from your two letters.

Once you have chosen the strongest feeling, spend the rest of the time going into greater depth. On page __, you will find questions to help you with the verbal dialogue.

Just as _____ and _____ did last night, one of you will continue to describe your feeling while the other listens and asks questions to arrive at a mutual experience of the feeling, which is the goal of your verbal dialogue.

VI D. Set up dialogue (CL or CS: 2:00)

Suggested wording:

We are now going to give you an opportunity to offer a true gift of love to your spouse by sharing your feelings in a love letter. If you will turn to page ____, you will see a list of “Symptoms of Disillusionment.” After you have separated to write, we would like you to review that list and check off the symptoms that are now or have ever been a source of disillusionment in your relationship. Even if you check off every symptom, we assure you that it is quite normal to experience these symptoms at one time or another.

As you are going through the list, there probably will be one or two symptoms that produce an instant reaction in you. Choose whatever the symptom is that triggers the strongest feeling, and write it down.

After you have started your love letter, you might say something like: “The symptom that jumps out at me is taking each other for granted.”

Next, you will need to identify the strongest feeling when you think about this symptom. Perhaps you feel hurt, or lonely, or frustrated, or even angry. Remember that your feeling is neither right nor wrong, so there is no need to defend it or to explain it or try to blame your spouse for your feeling.

In this love letter, you simply need to describe what this feeling is like, using “I” messages rather than “you” messages. You can refer back to pages __ in your Workbook if you need some help.

This love letter is not a chance to talk about why a certain symptom is present. In fact, this love letter is not about the symptom at all! The love letter is about YOU, offering your spouse a gift of love by using this entire writing time to share your deepest feeling.

Worksheets for dialogue (as in Workbook): Symptoms of Disillusionment

Writing time: 20:00

Dialogue time: 20:00

Husbands stay in the conference room to write (recommended).

NOTE:

When you release the husbands (recommended) to go to the rooms, you might remind them of how you are going to call them back.

How we live the concepts of this presentation:

We are aware of our own married single attitudes and behaviors and do not allow them to take root in our relationship.

We are open to acknowledge and share our feelings when the stage of disillusionment occurs in our relationship. We are willing to make decisions to love and to be loved in order to continue to grow in intimacy and understanding of our spouse.

Living out the concepts of Marriage in Today's World doesn't mean that we, as presenting teams, won't experience the stage of disillusionment in our relationship. It means that we are proactive in making the decision to love and to be loved more quickly in order to break out of the downward spiral of disillusionment. We are willing to sacrifice for the sake of our spouse and make the decision to love or to be loved even when our feelings are in conflict with our decision.

We write a love letter to each other and dialogue daily.

An assessment for us as a couple:

- What married singles attitudes and behaviors most interfere with our relationship TODAY?
- When was the last time I made the decision to love or the decision to be loved in our everyday lives?
- Is our relationship currently in the stage of romance or the stage of disillusionment?
- When did we last experience the stage of joy in our relationship?

Dialogue questions to help the presenting team develop their presentations:

HDIF?	How do I feel?	HDIFA?	HDIF about?
HDIFAT?	HDIFA this (or that)?	HDIFAMA?	HDIFA my answer?
HDIFSTWY?	HDIF sharing this with you?	HDIFTYT?	HDIF telling you this?

1. Who or what had the strongest positive influence on my expectations for marriage?
HDIFAT?
2. Who or what had the strongest negative influence on my expectations for marriage?
HDIFAT?
3. What were my expectations when we were married? HDIFSTWY?
4. How would I rate our marriage compared to the marriages around us? HDIFAMA?
5. What is my strongest memory of when we first met? HDIFAT?
6. Do I remember the first time I thought “The honeymoon is over”? HDIFSTWY?
7. In what ways was I living a married singles lifestyle before our Marriage Encounter experience? HDIFAT?
8. In what ways have I been living a married singles lifestyle since our Marriage Encounter experience? HDIFAT?
9. When have I felt the happiest in our marriage? HDIFAMA?
10. When have I felt the loneliest in our marriage? HDIFAMA?
11. Do I see our marriage as “ordinary”? If so, what am I willing to do to change that?
HDIFAMA?
12. How did I feel when I first heard about the decision to love on our Marriage Encounter experience?
13. How do I feel now about making the decision to love or to be loved?
14. When we began writing dialogue love letters, what, in me, made me hesitant to try?
HDIFAMA?
15. Is it easier for me to make the decision to love or the decision to be loved? HDIFAMA?
16. When did I recently make the decision to love? HDIFAT?
17. When did I recently make the decision to be loved? HDIFAT?
18. Have we ever used the Guidelines for Constructive Confrontation in our marriage?
HDIFAMA?
19. Which of the Guidelines for Constructive Confrontation have been the most life-giving?
HDIFAT?
20. Do I believe we have experienced the stage of joy in our relationship? HDIFAMA?
21. How did I feel when we were asked to write a love letter on our Marriage Encounter experience?
22. What is the strongest symptom of disillusionment that is present in our marriage right now? HDIFAT?
23. What is the biggest obstacle I face when writing you a love letter on a symptom of disillusionment? HDIFAMA?
24. When did I make the decision to love recently? HDIFAT?
25. When did I make the decision to be loved recently? HDIFAT?

SYMPTOMS OF DISILLUSIONMENT

Instructions:

1. Review the list below, and check all the symptoms of disillusionment that are now or have recently been a source of disillusionment in your marriage.
2. In your notebook, write the symptom which generates the strongest feelings.
3. Write your love letter, focusing on your feelings. Describe your strongest feeling as fully as you can. The love letter you write is about you and your feeling, and not about the symptom.

Check all that apply:

- Moodiness in our marriage
- Feelings of disillusionment, boredom, emptiness and loneliness in our relationship
- Indifference to each other's problems, interest, jobs
- Not enough affection and small courtesies between us
- Feelings of insecurity, jealousy
- A sense of being better understood by others than by my spouse
- Nagging
- Lack of planning things together
- A sense of being used
- More interest in position and money than me
- Taking each other for granted
- No excitement in our relationship
- Frequent quarrels
- Insults, rudeness, sarcasm, criticism
- Continuous escapes, together or alone, such as, TV, sports, socializing, liquor, hypochondria, etc.
- A desire to be right all the time
- Possessiveness of: my checkbook, my kitchen, my children, my body, my taste in the house, my friends, my time
- Being overly sensitive
- Irresponsibility: around the house, with the children, with money, with commitments
- Acting independently
- Closed to having (more) children
- Distance in our sexual relationship
- Being too controlling

Confronting for the Sake of Our Relationship

When we have a disagreement, one of the decisions to love may be to confront for the sake of our relationship. This can be positive if we face issues together. We call this constructive confrontation. The guidelines below can help. Constructive confrontation can keep us open and honest and is life-giving for our relationship.

1. Your relationship is more important than any issue or situation. Keep your discussion focused on each other and not the issue. Confront for understanding, not to win.
2. Stay physically close, even though it may be difficult. A small gesture of affection can show caring. Eye contact also helps.
3. Don't bring in a third party. A parent, friend, or co-worker has no part in your confrontation. Even comparisons like “you're just like your mother” can fuel the fire.
4. Finish the discussion; do not walk away no matter how hard it is to stay. This can be hard, especially when you are exasperated, or want to avoid conflict. Tears are okay if they stem from vulnerability or frustration. Do not use tears as a weapon or to end confrontation. Be sensitive! If you cannot finish the discussion, make a commitment to come back to the issue later.
5. Avoid absolutes like “you always” or “you never.” Absolutes are almost never true.
6. Do not waste time placing blame. It only drives a wedge between you. Move forward and do not waste time looking back.
7. Avoid name calling and character assassination. Treat each other with respect and gentleness.
8. Avoid sarcasm and criticism. Both are hurtful and damage relationships.
9. Sometimes it's best to postpone the confrontation. For instance, one or both may be too tired, out of control, under the influence of alcohol or drugs, or looking for revenge.