

# Within *Our* Reach Overview

*Within Our Reach* is a new curriculum from PREP designed to help economically disadvantaged couples achieve their goals in relationships, family, and marriage. The curriculum is designed to build on the existing strengths of the couple and add critical life and relationship skills that will help participants to create safer, more stable couple relationships, and by extension, better environments for their children.

Though *Within Our Reach* has as its starting point the PREP foundation, it is a completely new curriculum. *Within Our Reach* was developed with a careful eye on the recently flowering research literature on fragile and disadvantaged families, which is emerging from several large, important studies around the country. This research has identified some important issues that place low-income couples at higher risk for relationship difficulties, and serve as significant barriers to marriage and marital success.

Through extensive contact, interviews and piloting in ethnically and financially diverse communities, the *Within Our Reach* team has worked to make the curriculum as accessible and practical as possible for participants from a variety of communities. Focus groups from low-income and inner-city communities were asked to help refine and develop format and content. Some segments are being piloted with test groups to ensure that the ideas and skills in *Within Our Reach* come across clearly.

PREP, Inc has learned a great deal about how to develop curricula and how to implement and train people to use them (PREP/CPREP for couples, relationship education programs for the United States military, and the increasingly popular *Within My Reach* curriculum). *Within Our Reach* represents an integration of current research on low income and fragile families with tried and tested materials.

## How Does *Within Our Reach* Differ from Standard PREP?

### **Standard PREP**

The Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program (PREP) is a research-based approach to teaching couples (premarital or marital) how to communicate effectively, work as a team to solve problems, manage conflicts without damaging closeness, and preserve and enhance commitment and friendship. The PREP Approach is based on over 30 years of research in the field of marital health and success, with much of the specific research conducted at the University of Denver and funded by the National Institute of Mental Health, the National Science Foundation, and the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development.

PREP is empirically informed, meaning that, to the extent possible, the strategies of PREP are based on the growing body of research on marital and family health. PREP is also empirically tested. PREP has been studied intensively, including long-term outcome studies by six different research teams in four different countries. Further, the curriculum is regularly refined based on the latest research. In fact, WOR can be seen as the most significant refinement of PREP based on new research and pilot testing in decades.

PREP is a cognitive-behavioral curriculum, meaning the focus is on helping couples identify thoughts and behaviors that are associated with likelihood of success in marriage. As such, PREP has a strong skill base, rooted in research on how couples communicate and handle conflict, with additional strong emphases in areas such as commitment, expectations, and the maintenance of a strong positive bond in areas such as friendship, fun, and spiritual connection.

## **Within Our Reach**

The following points summarize the ways in which WOR has been built and major distinctives from PREP. The following emphasizes the different or new elements of WOR. WOR and PREP share the same cognitive-behavioral tradition, skill emphasis, and core focus on types of safety that characterize solid and satisfying marriages.

WOR differs from PREP in several important ways briefly identified here: the range of themes and concepts, specific emphasis on the needs of those experiencing economic disadvantages, and style of instruction.

## **Core Emphases**

- Emphasis on strengths (and not weaknesses, but barriers to achieving aspirations)
  - Goal is to address many vulnerabilities, but in context of these as barriers to aspirations, not immutable risks.
- Flow of sessions will promote *participants defining major themes*, with structure of schema based on research, piloting, and experience with couples applied secondarily.
  - Goal is to have participants drive their issues and perceptions into the flow, but have the structure of what is taught already well aligned with the dominant themes that will be raised.
  - We will supply the garage and the tools; they can drive their issues into it and work on their stuff.
  - Facilitate sense of curriculum being tuned to their issues—which it will be and process will make this very apparent by the way things are introduced.
- Great emphasis on what the individual thinks, does, reacts to
  - Emphasis on personal responsibility
  - More emphasis on controlling one's own reactions and behavior, regardless of partner response and actions

## Modifications from Existing PREP Model

- Process and Flow
  - Lecture content from basic PREP reduced and lectures broken up in much smaller pieces, interspersed with activities, exercises for couples, and skills practice
  - Smaller segments of content in lessons with more activities in between.
  - Practice skill time: more and with more variations
  - Activities: Many more group and couple activities that teach principles and key themes: high energy and meaningful.
  - Expand total time of contact and training.
  - Add in regular self-assessment pieces that are driven toward either feedback about progress or understanding that builds connection. Many sessions will have this aspect as well.
  - More time built into the format for skills practice and exercises to allow for more practice skills of skills within program in case there is less opportunity because of time pressures for couples outside of the program.
  - Some emphasis on homework, but measured to what is reasonable and what a particular site is able to do in this way with it's clients.
  - Global themes and specific, customized themes:
    - Some core content areas dealt with directly for all participants (e.g., communication and conflict management; expectations clarification; commitment).
    - Some important themes like dealing as a team with racism or joblessness or depression will not be dealt with as major content themes for all participants, but will be introduced as grist for the processing mill (skills practice and working with the couples to strengthen their ability to work together).
- Instructor facilitation (making it easier and more fun to teach)
  - More user-friendly formatting
  - Scripts provided for facilitators (as in Within My Reach)
  - More activities in addition to lecture and skill practice designed to engage and teach core themes and competencies
  - More movement between types of teaching methods, per the categories listed next
  - New videos with more content, including skill based video and also video designed to help focus teaching of concepts and focus discussions

## Major Organizing and Recurring Themes

These themes are introduced early and often. They are major recurring schemas to remind participants about in terms of the end goal and ways under their control to get there.

- **Safety** theory
  - *Physical* Safety (freedom from harm and physical aggression or psych abuse)
  - *Emotional* Safety and Support
    - Connected
    - Support
    - Conflict under control
    - Safe to talk
  - *Commitment* safety and security
    - A future
    - An us
  - *Contextual* Safety
    - Crime
    - Health
    - Economic
    - Racism
    - Cultural factors

## **Use of Video Segments**

Video segments will be used throughout WOR. There are three major types of video that will be employed. Not all units will have video segments; only those units where it is helpful to teach, highlight points, or keep interest will have video segments available for use.

1. **Core Teaching:** Most of the core instruction in WOR is interactive, activity based, with chunks of directed teaching (didactic) part of the process. In some units, we will supply video that can be used for teaching the core content of the lesson in that unit. This will only occur in one or two places, one being the teaching of the Speaker Listener Technique. We have a new, 15 minute segment that teaches the technique very strongly, and we can use such a device to allow video to teach such an important, core content piece with perfect fidelity. We are considering doing likewise in only one or two other places, with commitment being another possibility.
2. **Couple Interaction and Skills use:** As we have done for years with PREP, we will employ segments of real couples doing things poorly or doing things skillfully to highlight teaching about communication and conflict management. We have already filmed about 12 new couples that we can draw upon, and plan to film some more in the coming months.
3. **Interview Nuggets:** We have been interviewing individuals about their view of relationships, asking all kinds of questions about broad themes like marriage and cohabitation, men and women, as well as specific themes such as those in WOR like commitment, forgiveness, fun, friendship, support, etc. We plan to use small bits of these segments throughout the curriculum to add spice and a human face on the core content themes of WOR. For example, in the unit on fun and friendship, we will add approximately two minutes of several individuals talking about what they think preserves these positive connections in marriage (relationships). We usually have both partners answering the same questions, so where useful, we can also compare the partner responses of those we have interviewed.

## Specifics of Within Our Reach

Approximately 34 Hour CORE Curriculum

Ancillary Modules

Money management (strongly recommended. one day format, offered quarterly)

Additional information on substance abuse and depression  
(covered briefly in CORE curriculum)

Training and Support

Training in *Within Our Reach* is provided by PREP, Inc. Initial training will be longer and more in depth than traditional PREP. Traditional PREP trainings have been offered in three day trainings. Those wishing to utilize WOR will be trained in a four day training with pre-work and homework required, with additional training required for ancillary modules.

Additional training, guidance, and support can be provided for those using the curriculum through technical assistance agreements with PREP, Inc.

## Within Our Reach Draft List of Content Units

The units could be formatted in a number of ways. One major possibility would be that a site does a Saturday workshop every month that is the best starting point for couples. After that workshop, couples could pick up with other sessions that would be on weeknights.

Unit	Content
1.	Introduction Safety Theory
2.	Fun and Friendship
3.	Escalation and Time-Out
4.	Speaker-Listener Technique
5.	Stress Management
6.	Other Communication Danger Signs
7.	Dealing with Feelings
8.	Personality Differences and Relationships
9.	Issues and events
10.	Family of Origin influences on Relationships
11.	Enhancing the Sexual/Sensual side of Relationship
12.	Acceptance and forgiveness
13.	Future Directions

14.	Social support
15.	Co-parenting
16.	Contentment and wellbeing
17.	Commitment

Full Day Money Management Workshop (6 Hours)	Money management skills (e.g., teamwork orientation, couple developing a budget together, couple discussing debt, etc.) The focus would be on a few major skills rather than a lot of information.
--	--

## Unit Structure (Generic)

### **15 Minutes: Checking In**

Opening group process of checking in and talking about how the last week has gone. A focus would be what people have been trying or doing based on what they learned last time. Key would be if we could make this a group activity that would be FUN but also instill some sense of accountability in terms of doing and trying things based on what people are learning.

This opening part will be used by instructor to pull together a review of the core ideas around the theme of the last lesson.

### **5 Minutes: Overview**

Thumbnail sketch: Enough to get the ideas flowing and juices going, but not the main lesson of materials being taught.

For example, on social support: People could be first asked to think about all the kinds of people in life that are helpful to others, and vice versa (where they are helpful to others as well). They could brainstorm about types of helpers and supporters in life. Then, a schematic of different types of supports and people could be put up briefly.

### **25 Minutes: Group Activity**

Group activities (small groups or one large, but NOT couple level for this): This activity would engage the participants in the theme of this lesson. The activity could be of variety of sorts, with the specific model chosen for a specific lesson being based on the needs of that lesson.

[This could be discussions, drawing-led discussions, group card/content driven activities, etc.]

For example, on social support: There could be small groups discussing how tends to be supportive of their relationships and who does not. How does it help when a couple has others supporting them? What kinds of supports are most powerful and helpful?

### **20 Minutes: Lesson**

Instructor presents core teaching related to the themes of the lesson, using didactic, video, and other tools. This lesson includes processing what small groups came up with in the activity time.

### **35 Minutes: Couple Activity and Planning**

Couple focuses on theme of lesson in guided activity or skills practice (depending on what the theme is and best use of their time). Key is for couple to start learning a new skill or develop a plan of action on the theme of the lesson.

For example, couples could work through materials helping them to think and share about their perceptions of supportive folks in their lives, and what they can do differently as a couple to enhance their support network. For topics like that, emphasis would be on specific, doable, action plan that couple leaves session with and for which there would be follow up in the program structure.

### **10 Minutes: Wrapping Up**

Group comes together to share any further thoughts and encouraging ideas or words. Instructor gives couples motivational charge as they leave.

## References Related to PREP and Research by the PREP Team

An extensive list of references (by many different scholars) that informs our work can be found on our website: [www.PREPinc.com](http://www.PREPinc.com)  
[http://www.prepinc.com/main/docs/other\\_useful\\_refs.htm](http://www.prepinc.com/main/docs/other_useful_refs.htm)

This specific list is a sampling of works by the PREP team and the lab of Markman and Stanley at the University of Denver.

- Clements, M. L., Stanley, S. M., & Markman, H. J. (2004). Before they said "I do": Discriminating among marital outcomes over 13 years based on premarital data. *Journal of Marriage and Family, 66*, 613-626.
- Coie, J., Watt, N., West, S. G., Hawkins, J. D., Asarnow, J. R., Markman, H. J., Ramey, S. L., Shure, M. B., & Long, B. (1993). The science of prevention: A conceptual framework and some directions for a national research program. *American Psychologist, 48*, 1013-1022.
- Hahlweg, K. & Markman, H. (1988). The effectiveness of behavioral marital therapy: Empirical status of behavioral techniques in preventing and alleviating marital distress. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology 56*, 440-447.
- Hahlweg, K., Markman, H. J., Thurmaier, F., Engl, J. & Eckert, V. (1998). Prevention of marital distress: Results of a German prospective longitudinal study. *Journal of Family Psychology, 12*, 543-556.
- Halford, K., & Bouma, R. (1997). Individual psychopathology and marital distress. In K. Halford & H.J. Markman (Eds.). *Clinical Handbook of Marriage and Couples Intervention*, (pp. 291-321). New York: John Wiley and Sons.
- Halford, K. & Markman, H. (1997). Conceptions of a healthy marriage. In K. Halford & H. Markman (Eds.), *Clinical handbook of marriage and marital interaction*. London, England: Wiley.
- Halford, K. W., Markman, H. J., Kline, G. & Stanley, S. M. (2003) Best practice in couple relationship education. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy, 29*, 385-406.
- Halford, K. W., Sanders, M. R., & Behrens, B. C. (2001). Can Skills Training Prevent Relationship Problems in At-Risk Couples? Four-Year Effects of a Behavioral Relationship Education Program. *Journal of Family Psychology, 15*, 750-768.
- Jenkins, N. H., Stanley, S. M., Bailey, W. C, & Markman, H. J. (2002). *You paid how much for that?! How to win at money without losing at love*. San Francisco: Jossey Bass, Inc.
- Karney, B. R., & Bradbury, T.N. (1995). The longitudinal course of marital quality and stability: A review of theory, method, and research. *Psychological Bulletin, 118*, 3-34.
- Laurenceau, J. P., Stanley, S. M., Olmos-Gallo, A., Baucom, B., & Markman, H. J. (2004). Community-based prevention of marital dysfunction: Multilevel modeling of a randomized effectiveness study. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 72*, 933-943.
- Markman, H. J., & Floyd, F. (1980). Possibilities for the prevention of marital discord: A behavioral perspective. *American Journal of Family Therapy, 8*(2), 29-48.
- Markman, H., Floyd, F., Stanley, S. & Storaasli, R. (1988). The Prevention of Marital Distress: A Longitudinal Investigation. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 56*, 210-217.
- Markman, H.J., & Hahlweg, K. (1993). The prediction and prevention of marital distress: An international perspective. *Clinical Psychology Review, 13*, 29-43.
- Markman, H. J., & Halford, K. (2005). International perspectives on couple relationship education. *Family Process, 44*, 139-146.

- Markman, H. J., & Halford, K. (2005). International Perspectives on Couple Relationship Education. *Family Process, 44*, 139-146.
- Markman, H. J., Halford, W. K., & Cordova, A. D. (1997). A grand tour of future directions in the study and promotion of healthy relationships. In W. Halford & H. Markman (Eds.), *Clinical handbook of marriage and couples interventions*. Chichester, England: John Wiley & Sons.
- Markman, H.J., Renick, M.J., Floyd, F., Stanley, S., & Clements, M. (1993). Preventing marital distress through communication and conflict management training: A four and five year follow-up. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 62*, 70-77.
- Markman, H.J., Stanley, S.M., & Blumberg, S.L. (2001) *Fighting for Your Marriage*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, Inc.
- Markman, H.J., Stanley, S.M., Blumberg, S.L., Jenkins, N. H., & Whiteley, C. (2004). *12 Hours to a Great Marriage*. New York: Wiley and Sons.
- Markman, H. J., Stanley, S. M., & Kline, G. H. (2003). Why marriage education can work and how government can be involved: Illustrations from the PREP approach. In Allen, W.D., & Eiklenborg, L.L. (Eds). *Vision 2003: Contemporary family issues*. National Council on Family Relations, Minneapolis, MN.
- Markman, H. J., Whitton, S. W., Kline, G. H., Stanley, S. M., Thompson, H., St. Peters, M., Leber, B. D., Olmos-Gallo, P. A., Prado, L., Williams, T., Gilbert, K., Tonelli, L., Bobulinski, M., and Cordova, A. (2004). Use of an empirically-based marriage education program by religious organizations: Results of a dissemination trial. *Family Relations, 53*, 504-512.
- Notarius, C., & Markman, H.J. (1993). *We can work it out: Making sense of marital conflict*. New York: Putnam.
- Silliman, B., Stanley, S.M., Coffin, W., Markman, H.J., & Jordan, P.L. (2001). Preventive interventions for couples. In H. Liddle, D. Santisteban, R. Levant, and J. Bray (Eds.), *Family psychology: Science-based interventions* (pp. 123-146). Washington, D.C.: APA Publications.
- Stanley, S. M. (2001). Making the Case for Premarital Education. *Family Relations, 50*, 272–280.
- Stanley, S. M. (2002, July). *What is it with Men and Commitment, Anyway?* Keynote address to the 6th Annual Smart Marriages Conference. Washington D. C. (paper is available on the PREP website [www.prepinc.com](http://www.prepinc.com))
- Stanley, S. M. (2004, May 5). *Testimony On Healthy Marriage before the Committee on Finance, Subcommittee on Social Security and Family Policy, United States Senate*. Washington D. C.
- Stanley, S. M. (2005). *The Power of Commitment*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, Inc.
- Stanley, S. M. (2006, March 20). *The development of relationship education for low-income individuals*. Invited address to the National Poverty Center. Ann Arbor, Michigan.
- Stanley, S. M. (In Press). Assessing Couple and Marital Relationships: Beyond Form and Toward a Deeper Knowledge of Function. In S. Hofferth & L. Casper (Eds.), *Handbook of Measurement Issues in Family Research*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associations.
- Stanley, S. M., Allen, E. S., Markman, H. J., Saiz, C. C., Bloomstrom, G., Thomas, R., Schumm, W. R., & Baily, A. E. (2005). Dissemination and evaluation of marriage education in the Army. *Family Process, 44*, 187–201.
- Stanley, S. M., Amato, P. R., Johnson, C. A., & Markman, H. J. (2006). Premarital education, marital quality, and marital stability: Findings from a large, random, household survey. *Journal of Family Psychology, 20*, 117-126.
- Stanley, S.M., Blumberg, S.L., & Markman, H.J. (1999). Helping Couples Fight for Their Marriages: The PREP Approach. In R. Berger & M. Hannah, (Eds.), *Handbook of preventive approaches in couple therapy* (pp. 279-303). New York: Brunner/Mazel.
- Stanley, S. M., Kline, G. H., & Markman, H. J. (In press). Sliding vs. Deciding: Inertia and the premarital cohabitation effect. *Family Relations*.

- Stanley, S. M., Lobitz, W. C., & Dickson, F. (1999). Using what we know: Commitment and cognitions in marital therapy. In W. Jones & J. Adams (Eds), *Handbook of interpersonal commitment and relationship stability* (pp. 379-392). New York: Plenum.
- Stanley, S. M., & Markman, H. J. (1992). Assessing commitment in personal relationships. *Journal of Marriage and The Family*, *54*, 595-608.
- Stanley, S. M., Markman, H. J., & Jenkins, N. H. (2002). *Marriage education and government policy: Helping couples who choose marriage achieve success*. Denver, CO: PREP, Inc.
- Stanley, S. M., Markman, H. J., Prado, L. M., Olmos-Gallo, P. A., Tonelli, L., St. Peters, M., Leber, B. D., Bobulinski, M., Cordova, A., & Whitton, S. (2001). Community based premarital prevention: Clergy and lay leaders on the front lines. *Family Relations*, *50*, 67-76.
- Stanley, S.M., Markman, H.J., St. Peters, M., & Leber, B. D. (1995) Strengthening marriages and preventing divorce: New directions in prevention research. *Family Relations*, *44*, 392-401.
- Stanley, S.M., Markman, H.J., & Whitton, S. (2002). Communication, conflict, and commitment: Insights on the foundations of relationship success from a national survey. *Family Process*, *41*, 659-675.
- Stanley, S. M., Pearson, M., & Kline, G. H. (2005, November). *The development of relationship education for low income individuals: Lessons from research and experience*. Paper presented at the meeting of the Association for Public Policy Analysis and Management, Washington D.C.
- Stanley, S., Trathen, D., McCain, S., & Bryan, M. (1998). *A lasting promise*. San Francisco: Jossey Bass, Inc.
- Whitton, S. W., Stanley, S. M., & Markman, H. J. (In Press). If I help my partner, will it hurt me? Perceptions of sacrifice in romantic relationships. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*.
- Whitton, S. W., Stanley, S. M., & Markman, H. J. (2002). Sacrifice in romantic relationships: An exploration of relevant research and theory. In H. T. Reiss, M. A. Fitzpatrick, A. L. Vangelisti (Eds), *Stability and Change in Relationship Behavior across the Lifespan* (pp. 156-181). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.