

A Happy Married Life



A Guide for Counselors and Faith Leaders working with Married Couples in Christian and Muslim Communities in Malawi in the context of HIV and AIDS

Publication Data

The “A Happy Married Life” was produced with technical assistance from Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health Center for Communication Programs with generous support from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

Published by: Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health Center for Communication Programs, 2012

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Acknowledgements

The ‘A Happy Married Life’ guide was co-authored by Assana Magombo, Jane Brown Leanne Wolf and Glory Mkandawire. Additional input was provided by the Taskforce Team: Jessy Puwapuwa (Blantyre Synod Health Development), Ellen Molosi (Evangelical Association of Malawi) Emily Kaimba (Chikwawa Diocese), Mary Ganiza (Arch Diocese), Idah Yusufu (Quadria Muslim Association of Malawi), Shekh Matola (Muslim Association of Malawi), Sheikh H.Kassam Saizi (Quadria Muslim Association of Malawi),

Patrick Kaudzu (Student Christian Organisation of Malawi), Ps. Anderson Mataka (Assemblies of God), Ps. Constance Kadango (Seventh Day Adventist), Ps. Peterson Kamanga (Seventh Day Adventist), Sheikh Kangomba (Muslim Association of Malawi), Salome Ziwaya and Dean Alick Msuku (Evangelical Lutheran Development Services), Zione Chimalizeni (Zomba Diocese), Godfrey Mkandawire (Malawi Council of Churches) and Malawi Interfaith Aids Association (MIAA)

BRIDGE II organised a review workshop that provided the opportunity for the Taskforce members mentioned above to contribute to the Guide. Religious Leaders of these institutions also contributed their invaluable input.

We would also like to thank Ps Semphere, who refined, formatted and translated the Guide to Chichewa.

Final revisions and design were made by the BRIDGE II Project Team.

Some of the information found in the guide was adapted from the following resources: *The Total Marriage: A guide to a successful marriage*, Jeffrey and Pattiejean Brown (2001), *Answers for your Marriage*, Bruce and Carol Britten (1995), *Happiness for Husbands and Wives*, Shyrock H (1970), *Planting Our Tree of Hope: A Toolkit on Positive Prevention for People Living with HIV*, Basalla, L. and Deutsch B. et al. (2008), *Heart to Heart Communication*, Vanpelt N. (2008), and *Communication for Couples*, By Nancy Van Pelt (2008). *Hand in Hand Bible studies to transform our response to HIV*, Isabel Carter and Maggie Sandilands- Tearfund (2010), *Keys to a Healthy Relationship: A Guide to Reduce HIV Transmission and Strengthen Long-Term Committed Relationships* (2007), *A Theological Call to Action; A Statement by The International HIV/AIDS Faith Advisory Board of The Balm In Gilead*

This counseling guide for couples is made possible by the generous support of the American people through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The contents are the responsibility of Malawi's BRIDGE II Project and do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or the United States Government.



Acronyms

AIDS	- Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
ARV	- Anti-Retroviral
BSHDC	- Blantyre Synod Health and Development Commission
CK	- Chikwawa
ELDS	- Evangelical Lutheran Development Services
ELM	- Evangelical Association of Malawi
FBO	- Faith-Based Organization
HIV	- Human Immunodeficiency Virus
MAM	- Muslim Association of Malawi
MCC	- Malawi Council of Churches
MIAA	- Malawi Interfaith Aids Association
MTCT	- Mother to Child Transmission of HIV
NVP	- Nevirapine
PMTCT	- Prevention of Mother to Child Transmission of HIV
QMAM	- Quadria Muslim Association of Malawi
SCOM	- Student Christian Organization of Malawi
SDA	- Seventh Day Adventist



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Part 1: Introduction

Welcome to “A Happy Married Life” – a guide for counselors and faith leaders working with couples of christian and muslim communities in Malawi.

This guide is designed for faith leaders and others who have been trained and assigned the duty to provide couples counseling by their church or mosque. The guide focuses on working with those about to get married and married couples to build a strong foundation for their union in order to help prevent HIV from entering the home. Additional information is provided to help counsel discordant couples living with HIV so they can have a healthy and loving marriage.

In Malawi, the faith-based community has been playing an active and vital role in the prevention of HIV and helping those living with the virus to live a fulfilling life. Counseling for married couples is a very important part of that response and faith-based bodies are in a unique position to provide this guidance. Faith communities have the advantage of meeting regularly and frequently, in special groups and religious gatherings on a weekly basis. These meetings provide an important opportunity for counseling, sharing experiences and inspiration. Faith-based leaders are respected among their congregants who turn to them for advice, guidance and counsel in times of need and perplexity.

Malawi has one of the highest HIV rates in Southern Africa. Many infections are spread within marriages either because one or both of the partners enter the relationship without knowing their HIV status or because they have relations outside the home. Seeking a relationship outside of marriage happens when communication has broken down, intimacy has been lost or the vows made to each other have been forgotten. This Guide will help couples strengthen their marriage by reminding them of their commitment to God/Allah and each other and by offering practical skills on how to better communicate and express their love.

Goal and objectives

The goal of the guide is to enhance the faith-based response to HIV prevention by providing trained counselors with practical counseling sessions and scripture and verse references to help couples build stronger marriages and avoid bringing HIV into the home, avoid re-infection and protect the uninfected partner.

The objectives of the counseling sessions are to:

- Give confidence and courage to people planning to get married by helping them choose a partner who is right for them.
- Improve couple communication and strengthen intimacy between married couples.
- Assure married partners and those entering marriage that obeying the commands of God, is one way to help prevent HIV from entering the home.
- Help men and women think through and take responsibility for acting on what they need to do to have a happy family life.

- Help strengthen families in their faith in God/Allah (Quran 66:6; 1 John 3:1-3; Psalms. 128:1) so they can become strong, dependable and trusted members of their religious community.
- Show men and women how to serve God/Allah as family members.
- Show men and women different ways of overcoming misunderstandings and learning problem solving skills in religious settings (Quran 2:228; Ruth 1:15-17; Mathew. 19.9).

Intended audience

The guide is designed for trained counselors working in a faith-based setting with married couples or those planning to get married. While the Guide does review key aspects of counseling, it is not intended to train counselors who have no prior training.



Part 2 – How to use the guide

A. Working with couples and groups

The guide is designed to be used either in a group setting with several couples or with individual couples. While the activities are outlined for groups, it is possible to address individual couples using the same activities. In this case, the discussion questions should be phrased in a more personal way to allow the couple to reflect on their own marriage.

Each chapter of the guide builds on the previous one. Ideally they should be conducted in order- one after the other; however Counselors can use selected chapters or sections of each session based on what they feel is appropriate with those they are counseling. The entire guide can be used in various ways – for example, each session may be conducted every day for half a day, or once a week for 9 weeks, or whatever schedule best fits the Counselor's and the couple's needs and setting.

When working in groups, it is best to keep the group small in number so that everyone has a chance to participate. Ideally, groups should be no more than 24 people (12 couples) but can be as few as four (2 couples).

The guide is useful when talking to couples at various stages of married life, including those who have just become engaged, are newly married, or have been together for many years. It can be used to counsel couples who are experiencing challenges in their marriage, want to strengthen their relationship, or are seeking to get closer to God/Allah as a couple.

B. Structure of the sessions

There are a total of nine chapters in the guide

All sessions are outlined as follows:

- Title
- Session introduction
- Session overview
- Sessions on cultural beliefs, myths, common sayings
- Activities
- Session summary and wrap-up
- “Homework”
- Important verses

C. Learning approaches

This guide uses different participatory methods, which give room for couples to express themselves. The methods include group discussion, brainstorming, role-play, small group work, drama and storytelling.

The advantages of fostering active participation include:

- Improved critical thinking skills;
- Increased retention and sharing of new information;
- Increased motivation; and,
- Improved interpersonal skills.

Participatory methods

Warm-up/icebreakers: Counselors may want to lead participants in a warm-up or icebreaker to help them relax, have fun, and to reconnect with each other. These may be in a form of a chorus, a song from a hymn book or from a singing group. The Counselor can also ask participants for suggestions on how to energize the group or have them walk around and talk to others.

Brainstorming: A brainstorm is an exploration of ideas and is a great way to open a topic for discussion. During brainstorming, no one should judge or place a value on an answer someone gives. This activity encourages participants to expand their thinking about an idea and look at a topic from different perspectives.

Group discussion: Group discussion brings out responses from participants on a particular topic or issue and provides many opportunities for the Counselor to increase knowledge or correct misinformation and for the participants to explore their feelings. Group discussions enable participants who would feel too shy to express themselves in a plenary session to contribute towards the discussions. The effectiveness of the group discussion is dependent on using open-ended questions, which are those that need more than a simple “yes” or “no” answer. These questions help to bring out feelings or thoughts about a topic or an activity.

For example:

- “What did you learn from this activity?” is an open-ended question because it asks the participant to share his/her thoughts and reactions. “Tell me how that activity affected you?” is another example of an open-ended question.
- “Did you learn anything?” is not an open-ended question, because the participant can simply say “yes” or “no”. “Does that make sense?” is also not an open-ended question.

Another way to ensure effective group discussions is to make participants feel their feelings and thoughts are accepted. People are far more likely to share if they know they will not be judged or criticized or that others feel the same way they do. Those leading groups should not dominate or let others dominate discussions but rather encourage everybody to participate.

Buzz groups: These are small groups of 2-4 people. During buzz groups, participants brainstorm about the topic in a relatively short amount of time and are asked to present their top 3-5 answers, instead of presenting everything they discussed.

Role-play: Performing role-plays is a great method for practicing and modeling new skills in a safe, supportive environment. Since role-plays can be very emotional, it is very important that the Counselor clearly explains that participants are playing characters and not themselves. It is important that the Counselor encourage participants to role-play realistic situations, and not ideal situations. Role-play provides the opportunity to experience a real-life situation, without having to take real-life risks.

If participants are reluctant to use role-play, counselors can perform the role-play themselves, perhaps with one or two volunteers from the participants, and ask participants to provide suggestions and ideas for what to do or say during the role-play. It is important to stress that role-play is an opportunity for participants to practice skills in a safe and supportive environment before trying them out on their own.

D. Use of verses from the Qu’ran and Bible

References to teachings/quotes from the Bible and Qu’ran are found throughout the sessions. These are to assist the counselor in grounding the session in holy teachings. These selected quotes are suggestions that can and should be augmented by the counselor.

E. Materials needed

- The Bible/Qu’ran
- Any other books that may be helpful in the counseling sessions
- Markers and flipchart or chalk and chalkboard are needed for some chapters. If these materials are not available the counselor should adapt the session based on what is available.
- Handouts are needed for some chapters. If you cannot make enough copies for all participants, try to have at least a few copies for participants to share. If participants cannot read, counselors can explain what is on the handout and also hand them out and ask participants to share it with other family members who can read it to them.
- Before the session, the Counselor should have appropriate referral information on hand for:
 - HIV counseling and testing
 - Preventing mother to child transmission of HIV
 - Male circumcision
 - Victim Support Units
 - ART clinics

You can get specific referral information for your area from a variety of locations, including, Referral Agents, CBOs/NGOs, and Health centers.

F. Reminders for the counselor:

- Read through the entire guide before starting the first session; pay particular attention to the important points in each chapter.
- Become familiar with each chapter before delivering it for the first time; make sure to have all the materials prepared in advance.
- Adapt the activities and group discussions to make the sessions more appropriate to the religion, age and literacy level of your particular group of participants.
- Think about and plan how you will handle strong emotions that may arise during sessions that discuss sensitive topics.
- Provide local examples and make the activities relevant to the participants' daily lives and concerns.
- Take time to know more about the people you are counseling.
- Make sure the place or environment where the counseling is taking place is conducive.
- Be conversant with all the Bible/Qu'ran texts in the chapter and spend time coming up with others that reinforce key points.
- Read other supporting documents or consult other experienced counselors, especially about topics you are less familiar with.
- Seek technical information from the Health Center, Health Care professionals, or NGOs/CBOs working in the field of HIV/AIDS.
- Be sure to have a way to address questions or comments participants raise that are not relevant to the topic being discussed – explain to them that their thoughts are important and you will come back to them at a better time; you can also put up a “parking lot” of issues on a sheet of paper to remind you and the group to come back to them.
- Plan for icebreakers and energizing activities. They can be a great transition from one activity to another or used when energy in the group seems low.
- Monitor participation and make sure you are not doing most of the talking. Encourage participants to answer each other's questions. For example, if someone asks a question, open it to the participants by asking, “Does anyone have an answer to that question?”
- Be sure to end sessions on a positive note, with a clear take-away message. When appropriate, identify next steps or possible solutions to the problem.
- Have fun! These sessions should be fun and engaging. If you are truly engaged, the participants will be too.

Part 3 a : Counseling review

What is counseling?

Counseling is a helping relationship where a counselor assists an individual, family, couple or a group of people to: identify current and/or potential challenges in their lives; analyze the situation objectively and compassionately; and, work through solutions to live a happier and more fulfilling life. The process of identifying and acting on the right solution remains the responsibility of the counselee(s). The counselor's duty is to shed light on the current or expected challenges and to help the person or couple understand how these challenges can be overcome.

Spiritual counseling is a unique form of counseling that uses spiritual resources as well as psychological understanding for growth and well-being. It can be provided by religious leaders, lay ministers, Imams, or support staffs who have training in mental health, social work, religious studies or theology.

Why is counseling important?

- It provides individuals and couples with information to enable them to make informed decisions.
- It helps individuals and couples to review life decisions and question them in a safe environment, so they can make better choices for a healthy happy marriage.
- It gives people the opportunity to examine issues in their lives that may be causing them or their loved ones pain and find a way to resolve the underlying conflicts.
- It helps people cope with current challenges in their lives and build resilience to cope with future ones that may arise.
- It can alleviate the stresses, fears and concerns one may have or experience about courtship and married life.
- It can help people make healthy choices so they can protect themselves and their loved one from HIV and AIDS.

How to be a compassionate, effective counselor:

- Make sure people feel at ease and comfortable so they can open up and share what they are thinking and feeling.
- Listen patiently to what people have to say and do not interrupt them, if they are having difficulty expressing themselves, ask them probing questions to help them say what it is on their mind.
- Do not judge responses but help people realize how their choices may be causing pain to themselves or to others.
- Pay attention to your body language and make sure that it is giving the same message as your words— for example, is your body held in a way that shows you are open to hear what they have to say, or are you sitting with arms folded,

or with a judgmental stare? Are you “actively listening” – nodding on occasion, smiling or looking concerned where appropriate? Or do you seem disengaged and is your gaze focused elsewhere?

- Regard the people you are counseling as experts with information experience and skills to share, not just to learn from you.
- Remember your role is to guide a process where individuals, couples or groups can analyze situations and resolve to make better life choices.
- See many possible answers to a situation or question rather than only one possible right answer.
- A good and effective counselor should be able to keep peoples’ secrets. If the counselor lacks confidentiality, people will not have trust in him/her and will not be open and share their problems with the counselor.



Part 3 b: Values reflection

The Faith-based response to HIV prevention, care and support comes from a foundation of love and compassion for all of God/Allah's creatures. Many people within the faith-based community, especially initially, struggle with how to deal with HIV, finding it difficult at times to separate judgment of the behavior from judgment of the person. Others have been affected by – and in some instances have perpetuated- stigmatizing attitudes and behavior without understanding the damage this causes.

All of us are shaped by our attitudes and values regarding HIV, often without realizing it. For many, these have changed over time as we learn more about the causes and consequences of the disease and as we see family, friends and other loved ones infected or affected by HIV.

Judgmental attitudes can lead to a culture of silence and stigma, which prevents those living with HIV from participating fully, and as a result he/she may turn away from the church/mosque. In addition, this culture of silence and stigma can hinder HIV prevention efforts and prevent people from accessing treatment, care and support.

To be a good counselor, it is important to make an honest assessment of your attitudes, prejudices and values about HIV. The following activity can help you, the counselor, to critically assess your own attitudes and beliefs to ensure you are creating a safe and welcoming counseling session.

Activity: Self assessment



Time:

30 minutes



Materials:

- Self-assessment statements and explanations.



Special preparations:

- If you are a trainer providing an orientation to the guide, this can be done in a group setting.
- If you are a counselor using the guide, go through the statements and explanations on your own.



Activity overview:

The counselor will critically look at his/her attitudes and beliefs around HIV, recognizing that some of these judgments may hinder a counseling session that is open and welcoming to all people.



Objectives:

The objective of this activity is for the counselor to identify any negative attitudes or beliefs that may prevent a counseling session where couples feel welcome and supported.



Instructions:

Step one: Review the self-assessment statements below. Take your time and think about your values. You may want to write down your views-whether you agree or disagree with the statement before looking at the explanations on the next page. Be honest with how you feel.

Self-assessment value statements

- Statement 1:** AIDS is a curse/ punishment from God/Allah
- Statement 2:** Married men and women who are faithful to each other cannot get HIV
- Statement 3:** Condoms encourage immorality and should not be talked about
- Statement 4:** Someone who is God/Allah-fearing cannot get HIV
- Statement 5:** Couples should go for HIV testing together
- Statement 6:** A religious leader who gets HIV should not be allowed to continue preaching
- Statement 7:** If someone goes for an HIV test, it means they have been practicing sinful behavior
- Statement 8:** An HIV positive woman should not have children

- Statement 9:** Couples who are discordant (where one person is positive and the other negative) can have a fulfilling and satisfying marriage
- Statement 10:** Women should never initiate sex or tell their husbands how to please them

Step two: After you have completed reading each of the statements, review your responses. Compare your responses to the information on the next page.

- Are you surprised by any of them?
- What does it tell you about your attitudes about HIV?
- What does it tell you about HIV and married couples?
- Do you feel ready to counsel others?

Step three: Once you have decided if you feel comfortable to counsel others, please begin by following chapter one for new couples who intend to marry or Chapter Two through chapter nine for couples who are already married.

If you feel you still need to think about or come to terms with some of your own attitudes first, seek counsel from others before embarking on this so that you are able to provide the best counseling possible.

Responses to Self-Assessment

Statement one: AIDS is a curse/ punishment from God/Allah

Explanation one: AIDS is a deficiency in one's immune system that makes someone unable to fight off other illnesses. Anyone can acquire the virus.

In Malawi there are almost one million people living with HIV. An estimated 120,000 of those are children and more than half a million children have lost one or both parents to AIDS. People living with HIV are part of God/ Allah's children.

God/Allah sees only precious children when he looks at us– not poor and rich, not slave or free, not people living with HIV and people without HIV. We should see people with his eyes too and love each other equally.

The subject of AIDS as a curse or punishment from God/Allah has been a matter of great debate in religious circles. While we would not resolve this matter in this section, suffice to say that as religious faithful, we desist from stigma and discrimination towards others on the basis of HIV/AIDS. This is irrespective of whether they have sinned or not.

Statement two: Married men and women who are faithful to each other cannot get HIV

Explanation two: HIV is only passed on when blood or body fluids (breast milk, semen or women's sexual fluids) from someone with HIV are shared:

- During sex (the most common way).
- During pregnancy, childbirth and breastfeeding.
- In blood transfusions (with untested blood).

If both the man and the woman tested negative before they married and remain faithful to each other during their marriage, the chance of contracting the virus is minimal. However if either or both people did not test for HIV before marriage, they may infect their partner without knowing it, even if they are completely faithful within the marriage.

Statement three: Condoms encourage immorality and should not be talked about

Explanation three: It is important to access the situation and determine whether it is appropriate to talk about condoms with married couples. The most effective way to prevent transmission of HIV is to abstain for those that are not married, or for two uninfected married individuals to be faithful to one another. It is also true that correct and consistent condom use may significantly reduce the risk of HIV infection and re-infection.

The use of condoms for discordant couples is recommended in order to protect the partner who does not have HIV from getting infected and for those who are both positive from re-infection.

Statement four: Someone who is God/Allah-fearing cannot get HIV

Explanation four: People who are God/Allah-fearing and God/Allah loving are also human and can sometimes make mistakes or put themselves in risky situations where they are exposed to HIV. Others can unknowingly become HIV positive from an unfaithful partner or if their partner did not know their status before they were married. HIV can also be transmitted through mother to child transmission and/or infected blood used in a blood transfusion.

Our individual attitudes may prevent our church or mosque from being the safe and welcoming community that God/Allah intended it to be. Therefore, it is important to not judge someone who is HIV positive, but to be compassionate and help him/her live a positive and fulfilling life.

Statement five: Couples should go for HIV testing together

Explanation five: Couples should be encouraged to go for testing together. When testing together it gives them the opportunity to find out about each other's HIV status. This brings the results into the open between them, removing the difficulty of sharing the news with their partner without the support of a health provider.

In addition they get couple counseling which will help them to face the challenge of having HIV in the family, especially HIV discordance. Discordance means that one partner is HIV positive while the other is negative. Discordance comes about in different ways. (Refer to the annex for more information)

Statement six: A religious leader who gets HIV should not be allowed to continue preaching

Explanation six: A religious leader should be allowed to continue preaching. Although there may be resistance among the people, there are many religious leaders who are HIV positive and continue to guide and counsel. The church and mosque is an inclusive center and should represent love and compassion, even for its leaders.

As mentioned above, religious leaders are human beings and can sometimes make mistakes or put themselves in risky situations where they are exposed to HIV. Others can unknowingly become HIV positive from an unfaithful partner or if their partner did not know their status before they were married. HIV can also be transmitted through mother to child transmission and/or infected blood used in a blood transfusion.

Statement seven: If someone goes for an HIV test, it means they have been practicing sinful behavior

Explanation seven: All of us should go for voluntary HIV counseling and testing, as there are a number of ways one can contract the virus. It is only when one knows his/her status that he/she can receive the medical advice and spiritual guidance needed to ensure they stay in good health – and if necessary receive ART.

Statement eight: An HIV positive woman should not have children

Explanation eight: An HIV positive woman can have children. Many HIV positive women are able to have healthy babies without HIV, with medical advice and the provision of ART to the mother before birth, and to the baby just after birth.

Malawi has adopted the new regime for pregnant women who are HIV positive recommended by WHO. All pregnant women with HIV are being provided with a triple-drug antiretroviral therapy (ART) as the most practical way to quickly reduce transmission of HIV from mother to child and protect mother's lives at the same time. The treatment is for life and is given to all HIV pregnant women regardless of their CD4 count.

A couple should be counseled by a qualified health care provider on the risks in order to make an informed decision about whether or not to become pregnant. If the couple chooses to become parents, it is important for them to follow all the guidelines for prevention of mother-to-child transmission.

Statement nine: Couples who are discordant (where one person is positive and the other negative) can have a fulfilling and satisfying marriage

Explanation nine: It is possible for a discordant couple to have a very happy loving relationship together. Couples may find they are discordant following HIV testing. There are a number of challenges the couple will face and they should be provided with counseling to best support each other to maintain their vows and to care for each other at such a crucial time.

Although a couple may test discordant, they may decide to marry or if they are married, continue to have a sexual relationship knowing their status. There are many men and women who continue to have happy, healthy sexual relationships even if they don't share the same HIV status. Depending on religious beliefs, the couple should be counseled on the risks in order to make the right decisions for them. The only way to be sure the uninfected partner is protected from HIV is by using condoms consistently and correctly.

Statement ten: Women should never initiate sex or tell their husbands how to please them

Explanation ten: Sex is a gift from God, designed to help build an effective marriage relationship based on mutual enjoyment. It should be fulfilling and enjoyed by both husband and wife.

Culturally, women have been taught they are not supposed to initiate sex. If they do, men may see this as a negative sign or feel threatened. Intimacy between a husband and wife is built on trust, communication and love.

It is important for couples – both men and women – to discuss what pleases them so both are satisfied in their marriage. This can be difficult given some of the cultural taboos around discussing sex, especially for women, but should be encouraged through couples counseling.



Part 3 c: Follow-up and continued guidance

Marriage preparation often concentrates on wedding arrangements. Much effort and attention are devoted to the event with little being done to prepare for life beyond the wedding day. Since marriage is a long-term relationship, counseling should strategically look at it as such considering that marriages can break even in old age. It is important for us to consider continued guidance for the following reasons:

- Some marriages do not last long because couples are not adequately prepared for life in marriage.
- Young couples are often shocked with realities in marriage when they discover that the expectations they had during courtship are not met.
- Couples need to establish financial survival skills in order for them to experience a fulfilling marriage with minimal tension around financial matters.

Specific plans for continued counseling for new couples:

- Counselors should arrange periodic visitations to get feedback on how the new couple are settling down in marriage and encourage them to continue paying attention to the building blocks of marriage (e.g. spiritual life; communication; financial management; conflict management; handling relations; sex life).
- Introduce them to new couple meetings within the church/mosque.
- Build the capacity of church/mosques' counselors to continue counseling beyond marriage. In addition, newly married couples should be given the liberty to interact with counselors of their choice.
- Encourage the young couple to begin reaching out to other marriage aspirants or younger couples.
- Since financial struggles are a major contributor to marital breakdowns, special sessions need to be arranged to help the couple manage their finances.
- Special attention should be given to counseling on issues of family planning, birth processes and child upbringing.
- Help them understand parental responsibility is the role of both partners.
- They need to be guided regarding areas of service and participation in the church/mosque.
- We need to establish stratified support groups in the church/mosque to ensure good rapport with their peers.
- Marriage counselors need good training, tools (counseling manuals) and periodic refresher courses to help them in their provision of counseling.

Chapter 1



Choosing a life partner

This chapter will look at the important things young people need to consider when choosing a life partner. One factor to consider when choosing a life-partner relates to the prevalence of HIV.

The chapter will introduce the friendship period, which is a time for young people to have a deeper understanding of who their fiancé/ fiancée really is and who they are in relation to their partner.

There are participatory activities included in the chapter to help participants have a clear understanding of the issues being addressed. There are also scenarios that will help pairs understand the qualities they need to look for in their partner.



Chapter overview

Audience:

The activities for chapter one are designed for participants who are considering marriage.

Outline:

- Title
- Chapter overview
- Introducing chapter 1
- Looking more closely at cultural beliefs
- Choosing a life partner
- A loving God/Allah honoring relationship
- Life skills-Overcoming peer and community pressure
- Deciding not to have sex before marriage
- “Forced statements” choice
- Advantages of abstaining and consequences of sex before marriage
- Special session on HIV and STIs
- Session wrap-up



Time:

5 Hours



Materials:

- Bible/Qu’ran
- Paper and pens

Preparations for the counselor:

- Read the whole chapter before you begin.
- Read the Bible/Qur'an verses related to the topic and other support materials to help you better facilitate the session.
- Consider other references or quotes that may be useful in the session.

Introducing chapter 1



Time:

20 minutes



Chapter overview:

In this chapter couples who are about to get married will discuss the topic of Choosing a Life Partner. They will look at important facts about how to make a wise decision when choosing a life partner, issues about sex outside marriage and the importance of remaining abstinent till marriage. The chapter will also look at HIV/AIDS issues and how this relates to sex before marriage.



Chapter objectives:

- To better understand the importance of choosing a life partner and what it means.
- To be more aware of HIV and the risk of having unprotected sex before marriage.
- To acknowledge the role and importance of seeking God/Allah's guidance when choosing a life partner.



Instructions:

Step one: Welcome the couples to the group.

- Point out that they will have the opportunity to learn more about themselves and their partner.

Step two: Briefly explain the topic of Choosing a Life Partner to the couples.

- The choice of a marriage partner is one of the most important decisions a person will make in his or her lifetime.
- Many times, people choose partners based only on emotional feelings and outward appearance but what should be most critical in choosing a life partner are the attributes of the heart.
- It is a decision that should be taken as seriously as any other major decision in life - with prayer, careful investigation and family involvement. Counsel can also be sought from loving parents and other trusted family members.

Step three: Tell participants that:

- Couples will actively participate in each activity, not just listen. They will help guide the session by contributing to discussions and participating in activities.
- Couples will be able to discuss feelings, values, and attitudes, as well as factual information.
- Couples will practice important skills to help strengthen their relationship with their partner.

Step four: Find out from couples:

- What are they expecting to gain from participating in this group.
- List their responses and clarify if you feel they are beyond the scope of the sessions.

Step five: Ask couples:

- What rules should the group have to make sure no one is disrespected?
- Suggest any others that you feel are important and be sure to include confidentiality.

Step six: Conclude the activity using the following discussion points:

- Asking questions is an important part of participation.
- There is no right or wrong answer; rather their experience, discussions, and commitment to God/ Allah will help determine the answers.

Activity 1: Looking more closely at cultural beliefs



Time:

20 minutes



Activity overview:

Couples will begin to look at some of the cultural beliefs or common misunderstandings in a community that encourage young people to have sex before marriage and how this relates to HIV/AIDS. They will discuss whether these beliefs are true or false and identify what support can be given in order to better address these issues in their own relationship.



Objectives:

- To identify various cultural beliefs and common misunderstandings to encourage young people to engage in sex before marriage.
- To provide true statements that support young people to remain abstinent until married.



Instructions:

Step one: Tell couples that they will be discussing cultural beliefs and common myths about having sex before marriage. In looking more closely, we will begin to separate myth from fact.

Step two: Ask participants to mention some of the cultural beliefs or common sayings related to sex and young people which they know. Allow time for discussions.

Step three: Some of the cultural beliefs people may come up with include the ones below. Read out the ones that were not mentioned.

- Boys who do not have sex before marriage are not considered to be real men.
- Boys will experience back pains and will be impotent if they do not have sex.
- Girls will experience pains during menstruation, back pains, and their breasts will not grow if they do not have sex.
- Having sex is the only real way to express your love.
- If you do not have sex your partner will break up with you.
- Once you are engaged you are told by relatives and sometimes friends to start having sex.
- After initiation, young men and women are told by the Initiators to do “dust cleansing” to confirm they are now grown up.
- The more sex you have-“practice makes perfect”- the better you will be.
- If you decide to abstain you are “half six”, “not size 8 shaped”, “rough skin” “kutuwa”.
- If you do no have sex you will not have enough vitamin K.

- Sex before marriage allows you to know your partner better and to see if you are compatible.

Step four: Wrap up the discussion on the cultural beliefs, common sayings and myths with the following points:

- Encourage young people to remain abstinent before marriage as sex before marriage is a sin before God
- There is high probability of breaking up before marriage if they start having sex before marriage
- The vitamins mentioned are available in different types of food and that there is no scientific proof of the myth
- Sex does not need practicing and sex before marriage can increase the risk of getting infected with HIV.
- If your partner truly loves you and does fear God/Allah, he/ she will agree to wait and not have sex before marriage. He/she will not demand sex as proof for love.

Prayer points:

Pray, as a couple, that:

- You will be able to accept the will of God concerning relationships and abide by it.
- You will support each other to remain abstinent before marriage.
- You will support and understand your partner's decision not to have sex before marriage.



Further reading:

Qur'an 24: 2

Qur'an 17:32

1 Corinthians 6:15-20



Activity 2: Choosing a life partner

**Time:**

45 Minutes

**Activity overview:**

Couples will begin to identify what qualities they would show to a life partner, as well as what qualities they hope to find in a life partner and how these qualities relate to HIV/AIDS. The activity will begin to explore why these qualities are important and whether men and women hope for different things in their marriage.

**Objectives:**

- To identify the ideal qualities one would like in a life partner.
- To begin to explain gender roles in a marriage.
- To discuss how positive qualities can help to prevent HIV from entering the home.

**Instructions:**

Step one: Explain to the group: We will now begin to think about choosing a life partner.

Step two: Divide the participants into groups of men and women. Tell the couples to:

- Discuss what three qualities you would show to your partner whom you love and three qualities you would expect from a loving partner.
- List these qualities down.
- Assign one person to report back to the larger group.

Step three: Have each group report back on what they discussed. Compile a list that includes all the qualities mentioned.

Step four: As a large group, agree upon the ideal qualities one should expect from a loving partner. Add additional qualities you feel may be important.

Step five: Looking at the list, discuss the following:

- Why it is important for a life partner to have these qualities and characteristics?
- Are there differences between what the men have written down from those of the women? Encourage them to try to explain why these differences exist. Most likely their responses will correlate to gender roles. Encourage discussion.
- How can you know that your potential partner has these qualities and characteristics? For example, he/she is loving, supportive and brings out the best in you.

- Communication is very important in every relationship. What type of communication should exist in a loving relationship?
- How can the qualities and characteristics discussed above help prevent HIV from coming into the home?
- Ask for additional comments

Step six: Wrap-up the activity and summarize the key points.

- Choosing a life partner is one of the most important decisions someone can make.
- The friendship period is time to have a deeper understanding of who your fiancé/ fiancée is. Is he/she a faithful member of his/her church/mosque? What weaknesses and strengths in character does s/he have? Is he/she honest or has a tendency to lie?
- There is no set period for two people to stay in a friendship. This can vary from one person to another. Some may stay in a friendship for 6 months to 1 year or even longer.
- Friendship is time to continue seeking God/Allah's guidance and assurance in making a right choice for a life partner and that you are ready to commit to marriage.
- A life partner should be loving, supportive and bring out the best in the other person.
- Good communication between partners should be encouraged during courtship. Partners should be able to communicate with each other openly about their fears, hopes, desires, likes and dislikes. This will help them to continue to have good communication when they are married.
- Culturally women are not encouraged to communicate their feelings but to always be on the receiving end. This should not be the case; women should be encouraged from the beginning to communicate openly with their partners. Men should encourage their partners to communicate too.
- Good communication means that both partners are free to speak their mind in a loving way and are heard.
- Having a loving supportive partner and open communication will help prevent HIV from entering the home. When communication breaks down and partners are not supportive of each other, one or both partners in the marriage tend to look outside the relationship for what is lacking in the relationship.

Prayer points:

Pray, as a couple, that:

- You will support each other to be the best partner possible, fulfilling your own expectations, as well as those of your partner.
- You will accept God/ Allah's plan to show you whether you have chosen the right partner in life.



Further reading:

Qur'an 24:3, 32

Qur'an 4:3

Qur'an 40:44

1 Samuel 16:7

Jeremiah 29:11

Activity 3: Life skills-Overcoming peer and community pressure



Time:

50 Minutes



Activity overview:

Couples will discuss pressures they receive from within and outside their relationship, i.e from peers, parents, relatives and the community at large. They will also look at skills they need to have in order to overcome pressures and have a successful relationship.



Objectives:

- To discuss pressures couples receive from peers, parents, relatives and the community
- To acquire skills on how they can overcome the pressures.



Instructions:

Step one:

Tell participants;

- There are different types of skills young people need to have in order to overcome different challenges that they encounter in life.
- These challenges can prevent them from realizing their goals. Some of the challenges include pressures to do something against their will from their partner, peers, parents, relatives and the community.
- If not properly handled the pressures can affect the relationship of the two.

Step two:

Read out the story of Tambula at the end of this activity. Ask participants to discuss the following questions in plenary;

- What were Tambula's dreams for the future?
- Tambulani needed to have some skills in order to realize the dreams he had. What type of skills was he supposed to have in order to realize his dreams and explain how the skills would have helped him?
- What other skills are important in life?

Step three:

Summarize the activity by highlighting the point below. Refer to annex 5 for additional information on the skills.

- There are different types of skills that young people need to have in order to overcome the challenges of life and realize their dreams. Some of the skills include good decision making, assertiveness, good interpersonal and communication skills, negotiation skills, conflict management skills and goal setting.

Step four: Ask for couples or individuals who are comfortable to share with the group some of the pressures they have experienced in their relationship and what they did about it. These can be pressures from any source.

- If they are not comfortable to share their own stories, ask them to share with the group a story of any other couple or person they know. They need not mention their real names.
- You can also give an example of pressures couples receive if they are members of different churches.

Step five: After the couples have finished sharing their stories, ask participants to discuss the following questions

- What other pressures do young couples receive from their peers, parents, relatives and the community?
- How do young people deal with these pressures?
- What is the right way of dealing with these pressures?
- What skills do young people need to deal with these pressures?

Step six: Wrap up the discussion by highlighting the following points

- There are different types of pressures young couples will receive from their partners, parents, relatives and the community.
- Pressures from within may include pressure to have sex, pressure on the man to provide material things to the girl, pressures to shorten the courtship period and get married, etc.
- Most of the times pressures from outside come in when the two belong to different churches, cultures, different social statuses, different back grounds, different educational levels, especially when it is the woman who is very educated.
- Young couples need to know that giving in to some of the pressures can have negative effects on their relationship as well as their future.
- Sometimes parents or relatives may have negative attitudes towards the partner of their son or daughter without genuine reasons and may ask him or her to call off the relationship.
- The son or daughter need to sit down and reason with the parents. It is not good for him or her to give in just because the parents have said so.
- However, sometimes parents or relatives may have good reasons for not liking the partner of their son or daughter. In this case, it is important for the young man or woman to listen to what the parents or relatives are saying.

Prayer petitions:

Pray as a couple that;

- God will help you overcome the pressures from within or outside their relationship.

Verses



Philippines 4:13

Psalms 1:1

Qur'an 24:33, Qur'an 5:77, Qur'an 45:18



The story of Tambula

Tambula was the only son of mr and mrs Galasi. She had two sisters. Their parents died when they were still young. They grew up with their uncle who was a business person. The money he was getting from the business was not enough to pay school fees for his children, Tambula and his sisters. As such Tambula started doing small pieces of work for people. Tambula's dream is to go to university and become a medical doctor, own a big house and get married to a good behaving girl. Tambula also plans to send his sisters to a good school where they can get better education.

Activity 4: A loving, God/Allah honoring relationship



Time:

45 Minutes



Special note for counselor:

- Youth need to be counseled adequately to ensure that they are deeply committed to God/Allah before they commit themselves to a marriage relationship.
- They should be further encouraged to strive for an adequate courtship period before they get married so that they make an informed decision.



Activity overview:

Couples will look at four scenarios and begin to identify whether the stories demonstrate a loving and respectful relationship, as well as a relationship that honors God/ Allah. In small groups they will begin to find solutions for each of the couples in the scenarios to strengthen their relationships. Issues of HIV and AIDS will also be discussed.



Objectives:

- To begin to identify what a loving relationship means.
- To discuss what can be done to strengthen a relationship.



Instructions:

Step one: Divide the participants into four groups. Pairs can either be together or separate. Tell the participants the following directions:

- You will each be given a different scenario (see scenarios at the end).
- Elect one member of the small group to read the scenario to the rest of his or her group members.
- As a group discuss:
- Is this a loving relationship and one that honors God/ Allah? Why or why not?
 - What can the couple in the story do to strengthen their relationship?
 - Assign one person to report back to the larger group.

Step two: Bring the groups back together. Have each group read their scenario to the larger group and give their responses to the questions. If groups are having trouble you can highlight the following points for each scenario:

Scenario 1: Rajab and Rachel

- It is a loving relationship.
- Rajab and Rachel remained faithful to each other, visited each other, did kind things for each other, shared their problems and dreams, and helped each other out.
- It is not clear that the two loved God/Allah although their conduct could make one conclude their commitment to God/Allah.

- To strengthen their relationship they may need to involve God/Allah.
- They should clearly declare their commitment to God/Allah.
- Rachel should emulate Rajab's kind gestures of buying or making small gifts or do something to show him that she appreciates and loves him. This should continue even after marriage.
- Rajab and Rachel both need to appreciate each other.

Scenario 2: Yankho and Yasimin

- This is not a loving relationship.
- There is no mutual respect and appreciation.
- Yankho seems to be making all the effort to keep the relationship aflame.
- Yasimin does not understand the importance of communication.
- In order to strengthen the relationship there is a need to involve God/Allah in their relationship.
- Yankho and Yasmin need to improve their communication and become empathetic to each other.

Scenario 3: Jacob and Amina

- It is a loving relationship.
- Jacob and Amina love each other with a sense of maturity.
- There is good communication between them.
- They encourage each other to be the best person they can be.
- They are true to each other
- They are God/Allah fearing and their conduct testifies to this.
- To strengthen their relationship they need to involve God/Allah in their relationship. They should clearly declare their commitment to God/Allah.

Scenario 4: Atikonda and Lonjezo

- It is not a loving relationship.
- Although Lonjezo appears to be loving, Atikonda needs to control his temper as this may drive Lonjezo away. It may also result into something serious once they get married i.e Lonjezo may start beating up Atikonda.
- To improve their relationship they need to be reminded of their Christian/Islamic teaching.
- Both Atikonda and Lonjezo need to improve their communication with each other

Step three: Ask the group

- How else can partners express or communicate love to each other before marriage? Allow time for discussions.

Step four: After all the groups have reported their scenarios, ask the whole group to look again at the story of Atikonda and Lonjezo. Ask a volunteer to read the story and discuss the following questions;

- What types of abuses are happening in this relationship?
- What other types of abuse happen between people who are in a relationship?
- How can loving partners avoid abuse from happening in their relationship? If it is already happening how can they put an end to it?

Step five: Wrap-up the activity and summarize the key points.

- A loving relationship that honors God/Allah is one where your partner has your best interests at heart.
- If your fiancé does not show that s/he is committed to a loving relationship that honors God/Allah before you get married, it is unlikely they will change after you get married.
- Remember that communication is also crucial in a relationship that honors God/Allah. Lack of or poor communication in a relationship is a sign of danger. Partners should deal with this problem before they get married, otherwise it will be carried on into marriage.
- There are different types of abuses that happen in love relationships. Young people should be encouraged to avoid any form of abuse from happening to them.
- Couples should know that misunderstandings/conflicts can happen even in a loving God honoring relationship. The way the misunderstandings are handled can help build or destroy the relationship. Some tend to abuse their partners when there are misunderstandings in their relationship. This is not healthy and should never be accepted as okay.
- If there is abuse in the relationship, loving partners should openly discuss about it or seek counseling. If abuse continues, the abused partner should feel free to walk out of the relationship.

Prayer points:

Pray, as a couple, for:

- God/ Allah's guidance and protection so that you choose a partner with God's guidance and your relationship is sustained.
- The love of the God/ Allah in your relationship.



Further reading:

1 Corinthians 13:5; 15:33

Eph 4:26

Proverbs 18:22

Qur'an 40:44

Qur'an 7:199

Qur'an 3:134

The prophet peace be upon him said: God Almighty is kind, and likes kindness and He rewards tolerance. He does not reward severity or anything else”

Scenarios for activity four:

Scenario 1: Rajab and Rachel

Rajab stays in a very famous township where he is working. Rajab proposed marriage to Rachel who stays in another township far from where Rajab stays. They are in a serious relationship and their parents are aware of the relationship. Even though Rajab stays in another town, he has remained faithful to Rachel. He visits her and buys her gifts. During her birthdays, he usually surprises her with gifts and sometimes organizes birthday parties for her. Many girls have tried to tempt him to divert his attention away from Rachel but to no avail. Rachel too has remained faithful to him. One of the bosses at the company where she works has been asking her for sex so that she can be promoted. But her answer has always been ‘No’, because she has made up her mind to keep herself for Rajab. She loves Rajab so much; she usually calls him, just to let him know how much she loves him. They share their problems, dreams and aspirations and help each other out and they are both dedicated members of their church/mosque.

Scenario 2: Yankho and Yasimin

Yankho and Yasimin are both in College. They are in a serious relationship and have promised to marry each other. Yasimin has problems with communication. She doesn’t usually share her plans with her partner. Whenever Yasimin has plans to do something or go somewhere, she will do that without informing her partner. One day Yasimin went to South Africa to buy things for business. Yankho tried to call her, but her phone was out of reach. When she came back, she did not bother to call him and let him know that she was back until Yankho paid her a visit. When Yankho wanted to know why she does that, her answer was simple, “do you have to know wherever I go and everything I do? I have the right to do whatever I want, go wherever I want without telling you.”

Scenario 3: Jacob and Amina

Jacob and Amina are in a serious relationship and they love each other so much. Their friendship has grown so strong to an extent that they have agreed to marry. Jacob and Amina realize that courtship is a time when you discover each others’ strengths and weaknesses. Whenever Jacob has noticed something wrong in Amina, they both sit down and discuss. Amina does not have problems with Jacob pointing out her weaknesses. She also does the same and Jacob too has no problem with this. Jacob and Amina also appreciate and encourage each other whenever one has done something good. They are both dedicated members of their church/mosque.

Scenario 4: Atikonda and Lonjezo

Atikonda and Lonjezo are both believers and they go to the same church/mosque. They have promised to marry after finishing school. Whenever Lonjezo has done something wrong, Atikonda finds it hard to control his emotions. He usually reacts in a negative way i.e he becomes angry and uses abusive language towards her, insulting her and sometimes threatening to beat her up. This is followed by a period of silence—no communication for more than two days. When his anger has cooled off, he goes back to her and the relationship continues. Lonjezo has expressed concern over his behavior but this has not solved anything.

Activity 5: Deciding not to have sex before marriage



Time:

40 Minutes



Special preparations for the counselor:

- Use the forced choice statements that are at the end of this activity. Skip those that are inappropriate and add any that would be meaningful.
- On one side of the board, write “Agree,” and on the other side write “Disagree.”



Activity overview:

Couples are asked to explore a series of statements about why people choose to have - or not to have- sex before marriage.



Objectives:

- To enable individuals to reflect critically about their own and others' decision-making related to sex and to strengthen personal reflection.



Instructions:

Step one: Introduce the activity:

- Today we will discuss some of the reasons people decide to have sex or not to have sex.
- Many different circumstances and feelings influence people's decisions about whether to have sex. Sometimes people can have mixed feelings. These will be explored during the next session.

Step two: Tell participants:

- I will read a few statements. These are values statements, and there is no right or wrong response to any of them.
- For each statement, if you agree, go stand by the side that says “Agree.” If you disagree, go to the side that says “Disagree.”
- “Force” yourself to choose one side or the other, even if your view is somewhere in between the two sides. Then, a few people can share their views.

Step three: Read each statement:

- After each statement, allow time for students to move to their “side.” Allow two comments from each side.
- Then go on to the next statement even if the conversation has not come to an end. Read as many statements as time allows.

Step four: After you have completed the exercise, ask the pairs the following question:

- Young people have many different reasons for choosing to have or not to have sex. Why is it important for a young person to think clearly about the reasons for his or her choice to have or not have sex?

Step five: Wrap-up the activity and summarize the key points:

- Young men and women may have very different views and expectations about relations and sex. These expectations need to be expressed and discussed before marriage to establish a sound basis for a good relationship.
- Young people often find it very difficult to learn about sex and relationships. Most information comes from their friends and the media. This often encourages a casual attitude towards sex outside marriage.
- Young people today face unprecedented pressure to have sex before marriage. Those who resolve to abstain are ridiculed in various ways.
- Powerful sexual urges are part of our nature but these are under our control. God/Allah’s ideal for sex is that we should abstain before marriage and remain faithful to our partner within marriage.

Prayer points:

Pray, as a couple, that:

- God/ Allah will help you to overcome temptations to involve yourself in sex before marriage
- God/ Allah will forgive those already having sex before marriage and will give you the strength to start a new.



Further reading:

1 Corinthians 7:8-9

Genesis 39:5-20

Exodus 20:14

Qur'an 17:32

Qur'an 24:33

The Prophet Muhammad peace be upon him said “Let him marry who amongst you is able to have sexual intercourse, and most certainly it greatly prevents the eyesight (from immoral acts) and protects the private parts. And who also is not able, he should keep fasts; and verily it is (as if he had done castration for him)”.



Activity 6: “Forced choice” statements

- If a girl loves her boyfriend, she should show it by having sex with him.
- I think most adolescents have conflicting feelings about sex; they want and do not want to have sex at the same time.
- I think it's okay to give someone money or a gift for sex.
- I think it's okay to accept money for having sex, if you need the money.
- I think that a real man has more than one partner and he usually has sex with all of them.
- Images on television and in magazines make young people feel that they should be having sex.
- Pressuring someone to have sex against his or her will, even if you don't use physical force, is more or less the same as rape.
- It is okay to have a Sugar Daddy so that he can give you money to buy the things that you want.
- If you have very strong sexual desires, it is okay to find someone to have sex with to relieve the pressure.
- A lot of girls I know have sex because they feel obligated to do so.
- Lots of young people just do not want to have sex. Their feeling has nothing to do with AIDS or pregnancy or with what adults tell them. They just do not want to be having sex, even if they have a boyfriend or girlfriend.
- It is okay to have sex outside marriage if this is a requirement to belong to a group of your friends
- A lot of people who decide to have sex regret it later.
- A lot of people who decide not to have sex regret it later.
- Before they have sex, most adolescents talk thoroughly with their partner about whether they both feel comfortable and want to have sex, as well as about how to protect against HIV, STIs and pregnancy.

Activity 6: Advantages of abstaining and consequences of sex before marriage



Time:

30 Minutes



Activity overview:

Couples will continue to discuss sex before marriage and how this relates to HIV/AIDS. Couples will be asked to identify the advantages of remaining abstinent, as well as the consequences of having sex before marriage.



Objectives:

- To have a better understanding of the advantages of waiting to have sex until after marriage.
- To discuss the consequences of having sex before marriage.
- To identify what steps can be taken to help couples make the decision to abstain before marriage.



Instructions:

Step one:

Tell the group:

- Today we will continue to discuss the topic of premarital sex, looking at the advantages of abstaining and consequences of having sex before marriage.
- I will read a story about a young couple who are trying to decide whether they should have sex or not.

Step two:

Divide participants into groups of 3-4 people.

Step three:

Read out the story of Nagama and Balani to the participants.

Step four:

After you have read the story, ask the groups to discuss the following questions (you can divide the questions up equally among the groups depending on time):

- What do you think made Nagama and Balani involve themselves in sex before marriage?
- What do you think the consequences were of this decision? What are other consequences couples may face if they have sex before marriage?
- How can couples avoid falling into this situation?
- What advice would you give to couples who have started having sex before marriage and want to stop?
- What are the advantages of abstaining from sex until marriage?
- What are the challenges of choosing abstinence?

Step five: Have each group present back what they discussed.

(Note to facilitator: If the groups mention HIV as one of the consequences, tell them there will be a special discussion about HIV following the activity. If they do not mention it, ask them if HIV might also be one of the consequences so that the next activity will emphasize the point.)

Step six: Wrap-up the activity and summarize the key points:

- When God/ Allah gave the command not to be involved in premarital sex, he said it out of love.
- If you have sex before marriage, you lose the most precious gift to your spouse- your virginity.
- Having sex before marriage is a sin in the eyes of the God/Allah.
- Having sex before marriage may result in many negative consequences including unwanted pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases and HIV. It may cause emotional break up, mistrust, guilt, loss of self esteem and regrets. It may also bring shame and reproach to the couple's parents, family, church/ mosque and village.
- Sexual excitement does not mean one has to have sex. Nothing bad will happen if you do not have sex. Waiting to have sex until you get married is a way to honor God/Allah's commandments and each other
- God/Allah has promised that in each temptation He makes a way of escape so that victory is always possible. With God/Allah's help couples can manage to overcome the temptation of having sex before marriage.
- Pressure from peers and the media also pose a big challenge but deciding to have sex is a personal choice and you can find groups of people who will support your decision and not pressure you. In addition to physical activities such as football, netball or taking long walks, reading or putting the mind on something else may also help.
- If an engaged couple has started having sex, they can stop and choose to abstain until they get married.

Prayer points:

Pray, as a couple, that:

- You and your partner can discuss things openly so that you can enjoy waiting together for sex in obedience to God/ Allah's teaching.
- God/ Allah will help you to handle sexual excitement so that you can wait for marriage before having sex.



Further reading:

- Qur'an 12
- Qur'an 6:153
- Qur'an 5:2
- Luke 1:27-28
- 2 Samuel 13
- 1 Corinthians 15:33



Story of Balani and Nagama

Nagama was born in a family of five children, three girls and two boys. She was the second born daughter and worked very hard in school. This made her parents very proud of her. Her vision was to become a medical doctor. When Nagama was selected to go to secondary school, she fell in love with a certain young man called Balani. Both Nagama and Balani knew that sex before marriage was a sin before God/Allah and they agreed not to involve themselves in this act. Lately Balani has been getting a lot of pressure from his friends to try sex with Nagama. They tell him he won't be a "real man" unless he does. Although he at first resists the pressure, little by little his friends' comments get to him. He in turn pressures Nagama. Afraid to lose him, she agrees to have sex with him before they marry.

Activity 7: Special session on HIV and STIs



Time:

30 Minutes



Special preparations for the counselor:

Participants may have a lot of questions about HIV. There is additional information in the annex that can help you respond to these questions. You may also want to bring in or refer participants to a trained health provider to answer difficult or technical questions.



Activiy overview:

Couples will begin to look at HIV and STIs as a consequence of having unprotected sex. The activity will encourage couples to test for HIV before marriage and remain faithful to each other in order to protect themselves and their partner.



Objectives:

- To explore the benefits of testing together for HIV and STIs before marriage.
- To discuss the importance of knowing one's status and to disclose if found positive.



Instructionss:

Step one: Explain to the group:

- One of the potential consequences of having sex before marriage is the possibility of contracting HIV and other STIs.
- HIV is a virus that is transmitted mostly through sex.

Step two: Ask for two volunteers (preferably a couple) to do a role play. Tell only the couple:

- You are planning to get married.
- You have never had sex with each other.
- Before you marry you both decide to go for HIV testing.
- The results show that one of you is positive.
- The other partner responds with concern but decides to stay in the relationship.

Step three: After the couple has completed the role play ask the group the following questions:

- What do you think happened for one of the partners to be positive?
- Do you think it was important for the couple to get tested before getting married? Why?

Step four: Wrap-up the activity and summarize the following key points:

- It is important for a couple planning to get married to go for an HIV test together, even if both people in the relationship have never had sex with each other.
- One person could be HIV positive even though the two were abstaining. He or she might have been born with it, or have become infected through a previous partner. The woman may have even been forced to have sex or raped and become infected at that time.
- One person could have become HIV positive before meeting his/her partner but did not know his/her status.
- One person could be faithful to his/her partner while the other person has other partners.
- The choice to continue with marriage arrangements when one or both is found positive lies in the hands of the partners.
- If one partner is found to be HIV positive, it is important for him/her to disclose his/her status to his/her partner.
- Couples should always be honest with each other and disclose other important aspects of their past life such as if you have a child, if you have had an STI, or if you were previously engaged.
- It is also important to go for STI testing. If a person has STI in his/her blood it can have negative effects on the unborn child and can also cause infertility and other problems.
- The best way to avoid HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases before marriage is to agree to abstain and remain faithful to each other.
- Once married, the best way to keep HIV out of the home is to remain faithful to each other.

Prayer points:

Pray, as a couple, that:

- God/ Allah will give hope to young people living with HIV.
- God/ Allah will give you the strength to reject behaviors that will put your and your partner's life at risk.



Further reading:

Isaiah 1:18

1 John 1:9

Qur'an 39:9

Qur'an 16:43

Summary and wrap-up



Time:

20 Minutes



Instructions:

Step one: Remind the group: Choosing a life partner is a decision that needs to be taken seriously.

Step two: Summarize the chapter: Highlight the major important points that have been covered in the chapter, include:

- Praying earnestly to God/Allah to lead them to make the right choices and continue thereafter.
- Abstaining from sex before marriage in order to honor God/Allah's commandments. This has many benefits and they include avoiding HIV.
- Clearly understand and identify the qualities of a good life partner.
- Although it may be hard to do, decide to break the relationship if you feel the person you are with is not the best partner for you.
- The chapter also discussed the "to do" and "not to do" things in a relationship that is pleasing before God/Allah.
- The issues of STIs and HIV/AIDS, the need for openness in the relationship and the importance of getting tested together before getting married have been emphasized.

Homework:

Tell participants to continue discussing these topics at home. Encourage couples to:

- Explore additional Bible/ Qur'an verses that give advice on how to choose a good life partner.
- Renew their commitment to remain abstinent.
- Discuss how they honor each other in their friendship and how it can continue to grow into a loving partnership.
- Seek additional counseling and guidance as it provides a healthy space for discussion and agreement.



Additional verses for reading:

1 Samuel 16:7

1 Corinthians 5:1, 6:13-18, 10:8

1 Thessalonians 4:3

Mathew 7:7-8

Genesis 24:1-67

Qur'an 2:27, 221- 228

Qur'an 3:36

Surat 2:221

Qur'an 8:30

Chapter 2



Marriage a gift from God/Allah

Marriage is a lifelong commitment. We do not go into marriage to experiment. As such, it should not be entered in hastily (Matt. 19:6/ Qu'ran 30:21). By nature, God/ Allah made man and woman in such a way that they should meet each other's sexual needs.

This chapter will help remind couples that their union is a gift from God and needs to be honored.

There are a number of activities that have been included in the chapter for couples to participate in and have a clear understanding of the issues being discussed. In some activities couples will be asked to do role plays, while in others they will be involved in group discussions to better understand how marriage is a gift from God/ Allah. By the end of this chapter, couples should appreciate the need to make each other happy.

Chapter overview

Audience:

The activities in chapter 2 are designed for participants who are already married.

Outline:

- Title
- Chapter overview
- Introducing chapter 2
- Looking more closely at cultural beliefs
- What is marriage?
- Responsibilities of husband and wives
- Marriage commitment
- Loving your spouse
- Chapter wrap-up
- Homework
- Additional verses



Time:

2 Hours 55 Minutes



Materials:

- Bible/ Qur'an
- Paper and pens



Preparations for the counselor:

- Read the whole session before hand.
- Read the Bible/Qu'ran verses related to the topic and other additional materials.
- Consider other references or quotes that may be useful in the session.

Introducing chapter 2



Time:

20 minutes



Special note to the counselor:

Do step two, three and four if you are meeting for the first time. But if this is not the first time the group is coming together remind couples that they are supposed to actively participate in all the activities. Also remind them of the rules which you formed together with them.



Chapter overview:

Couples will discuss more about the topic of Marriage- a gift from God/ Allah. They will look at the responsibilities of husbands and wives; will be reminded of the marriage vows; and, how they can express love to each other. They will relate all the issues in the chapter to HIV/AIDS.



Chapter objectives:

- To better understand the importance of marriage being a gift from God/ Allah
- Have a clear understanding of what the Bible/Qur'an says about marriage.
- Have a clear understanding of the responsibilities of husbands and wives in marriage and how they can express love to each other.



Instructions:

Step one: Welcome the couples to the group: Tell them they will have the opportunity to learn more about Marriage.

Step two: Introduce the topic of Marriage-a Gift from God/ Allah by highlighting the following:

- Marriage is a gift from God/ Allah. The creation of marriage is recorded in the Bible and the Qur'an. Marriage is not an invention of man, rather instituted by God/Allah.
- God/ Allah created man and then made woman to complement him. According to the plan of God/Allah, man and woman together form the unit of humanity. A man or a woman alone is only part of an entirety.
- In Islam, the marriage of a man and a woman is not just a financial and physical arrangement of living together but a sacred contract, a gift of Allah, to lead a happy, enjoyable life and continue the lineage. This solemn and sacred social contract is a strong covenant (Mithaqun Ghalithun). The main goal of marriage in Islam is the realization of tranquility and compassion between spouses.
- In Christianity marriage is an important relationship likened to the relationship between Christ and the church. Both husband and wife have obligations in marriage. The husband is expected to love his wife just like Christ loved the

church and died for it. Similarly, the wife is expected to be devoted to her husband. The main goal of marriage in Christianity is for the couple to glorify God in their union.

Step three: Tell Participants that:

- Couples will actively participate in each activity, not just listen. They will help guide the session by contributing information to discussions and participating in activities.
- Couples will be able to discuss feelings, values, and attitudes, as well as factual information.
- Couples will practice important skills to help strengthen their relationship with their partner.

Step four: Find out from couples:

- What they are expecting to gain from participating in this group.
- List their responses and clarify if you feel they are beyond the scope of the sessions.

Step five: Ask couples:

- What rules should the group have to make sure no one is disrespected?
- Suggest any others that you feel are important and be sure to include confidentiality.

Step six: Conclude the activity using the following discussions points:

- Asking questions is an important part of participation
- There is no right or wrong answer, rather their experience, discussions and commitment to God/Allah will help determine the answers.

Activity 1: Looking more closely at cultural beliefs



Time:

20 minutes



Activity overview:

Couples will begin to look at some of the cultural beliefs or common misunderstandings in a community around marriage. Couples will discuss whether these beliefs are true or false and identify what support can be given in order to better address these issues in their own relationship.



Objectives:

- To identify various cultural beliefs and common misunderstandings around marriage.
- To provide true statements that support couples to have a healthy marriage.



Instructions:

Step one: Tell couples: They will be discussing cultural beliefs and common myths about marriage which is a gift from God/Allah. In looking more closely, we will begin to separate myth from fact.

Step two: Ask participants to mention some of the cultural beliefs or common sayings related to Marriage- a Gift from God - which they know or which they have heard about. Allow time for discussions.

Step three: Some of the cultural beliefs or common sayings people may come up with include the ones below. Read out to the group the ones that were not mentioned:

- Women are responsible for all the work in the home.
- Women are supposed to be submissive and are not supposed to assume the same powers as men.
- Women are inferior and men superior.
- Marriage is only for bearing children.
- The husband is not supposed to take care of his own children.
- Fighting (battering) in marriage is the medicine that makes the marriage better
- Marriage issues should be kept secret, even if you are being abused.
- Your husband or wife is not your relative.
- Marriage is a contract that can be terminated any time you feel like doing so.

Wrap up the discussion on the cultural beliefs, common sayings and myths with the following points:

- God created man and woman equal. Neither is superior to the other
- Couples should know that marriage is a life long commitment and should be taken seriously, and not entered in a hasty manner.
- Men and women should share responsibilities in the home.
- Children are a blessing from the Lord; women should not be looked upon as child making machines. The health of the mother is put at risk if she bears too many children and if the spacing is very short.
- God expects husbands and wives to love each other just as He loves us and is patient with our mistakes. As such battering cannot be found where there is love and should not be excused as medicine that makes the marriage strong, rather it is dynamite that blows it apart.
- Some marriage issues are supposed to be shared with others for counseling.

Prayer points:

Pray, as a couple, that:

- God will help couples challenge the cultural beliefs, myths and common sayings that are contrary to the word of God and can cause harm in a marriage.



Further reading:

Genesis 1:27

Mathew 19:5-6

Qur'an 49:13

The prophet Muhammad peace be upon him said: Shall I tell you about the people of the paradise? They are every person who is weak and humble; If he makes an oath to God, God will fulfill his oath...(Bukhar)

Activity 2: What is marriage?



Time:

20 Minutes



Activity overview

Couples will have the opportunity to discuss the meaning of marriage and their individual understanding of the word.



Objectives:

- To help couples have a clear understanding of what marriage is.



Instructions:

Step one: Explain to the group: We will now begin to look at the word marriage and begin to explore what it means to each of us.

Step two: Divide the couples into buzz groups or smaller groups of up to 4 people (2 couples).

Step three: Ask the participants to pretend they are meeting foreigners from a make believe country who have never heard of marriage.

- Describe what marriage means to you.
- Be prepared to report back to the larger group.

Step four: Bring the groups back together and have each buzz group present what they discussed.

Step five: Once all the groups have presented, discuss the following questions:

- What are some of the common descriptions for marriage?
- What has been left out? Is there anything that is not part of a marriage?
- Discuss until the group agrees on what makes up a marriage.
- Correct any points that can cause trouble in a marriage and add in the following points if they were not already discussed:
- A marriage is a union between two people.
- People in a marriage need to respect each other, share happiness and be open to satisfying each other sexually.

Prayer points:

Pray, as a couple, that:

- God/ Allah will help you to have a marriage after God/ Allah's own heart.
- You will work together to always respect each other, share in each other's happiness, and be open to a healthy sexual relationship together.



Further reading:

Qur'an 9:71-72

Qur'an 2:228

Mathew 19:5-6

Activity 3: Responsibilities of husbands and wives



Time:

35 Minutes



Special preparations for counselor:

- On a sheet of paper write the different responsibilities that are in the home. Make enough copies for the number of groups you will have.
- Be conversant about what society defines as responsibilities of husbands and wives.



Activity overview:

Couples will begin to discuss the roles and responsibilities of husbands and wives in the home. With a spiritual perspective, couples will identify areas of burden and support in order to work as a team to ease the responsibilities often placed on one individual.



Objectives:

- To identify and challenge the roles and responsibilities of men and women in the home.
- To help couples to see how they can support each other within the home and in their marriage.



Instructions:

Step one: Explain to participants:

- We will now look at the responsibilities of wives and husbands in the home.
- These responsibilities may be defined differently by the society and the Bible/Qur'an. But the discussion will help us reach a mutual understanding.

Step two: Divide the participants into small groups of no more than 6 each, separating the men and women.

Step three: Give participants pieces of paper where you have written the different types of responsibilities for husbands and wives. Ask each group to answer the following questions:

- Which responsibilities are normally for a wife?
- Which responsibilities are primarily for the husband?
- Are the tasks divided equally among men and women? Who has more?
- How can husbands and wives support each other to carry out their responsibilities?

Step four: Wrap-up and summarize the activity by reviewing the following points with participants:

- Husbands and wives have important responsibilities to ensure a good marriage and should support each other to carry out those responsibilities.
- They have the responsibility to love and support each other, serve each other, provide for the children and take good care of the home.
- Men and women should strive to share the responsibilities equally.
- Conflicts regarding the division of labor in a marriage are bound to occur, but through open discussion and understanding and if both partners are submitted to Christ/Allah, these conflicts will be minimal.
- It is the joint responsibility of husband and wife to develop their family. Gone are the days when man alone was taken as a sole bread winner or that women were the only caretakers of the children. Allow your wife employment, so that both of you can contribute to the family's income. Let your husband share in the burden and joys of childrearing. Hard work should be the motto of your family.

Prayer points:

Pray, as a couple, that:

- God/ Allah will help you to support each other to carry out different responsibilities of the home.
- God/ Allah will help men to have a heart of humility and women to be appreciative of the help their husbands are providing.



Further reading:

Qur'an 30:21

1 Timothy 3:2-7

2 Thessalonians 3:10

Ephesians 5:25-29

The prophet Muhammad peace be upon said him: Everyone of you is a shepherd, and every one of you is responsible for those under his guardianship... (Bukhar)

Responsibilities for Husband and Wives

Responsibility	Husband	Wife
Working in the garden		
Laundering		
Cooking		
Breastfeeding		
Caring for the children		
Going to the maize mill		
Working		
Cleaning the house		
Caring for the sick		
Cleaning the bedroom		
Paying school fees		
Initiating love making		
Buying things in the home (chaires, tables, Television set, Radios etc)		
Buying things for the kitchen and food (Plates, pots, sugar, salt, relish, maize, etc)		
Ironing		
Taking care of the home		
Buying clothes for the children		

Activity 4: Marriage commitment



Time:

30 Minutes



Special preparations for counselor:

- Prepare handouts with marriage vows.



Activity overview:

Couples will review the marriage vows and help each other understand them clearly. They will also discuss how keeping the marriage vows can prevent HIV from coming in the home



Objectives:

To remind couples of the sacredness of the marriage vows and how they can effectively put them into practice.



Instructions:

Step one: Explain to participants that they will work together to relook at the marriage vows they shared on the day of their union.

Step two: Divide the participants into groups of no more than 6 people (couples should be together) and give each group the handout on marriage vows. Provide the following instructions to the groups:

- Remind each other the vows that are made when people are getting married and discuss them.
- Each group should identify volunteers (two couples) to do a role-play.
- One couple should demonstrate how the family is sticking to the vows they made on their wedding day and another should demonstrate failure to keep the vows. Give them time to practice.

Step three: After the groups have had enough time to practice, invite the small groups back together to show their role-plays.

Step four: Once all the groups have presented, ask the participants to return to their small groups to discuss what they observed from the role-plays. Provide the following questions to guide the discussion:

- In what ways did the couple demonstrate that they were keeping their vows?
- In what ways did they demonstrate that they were not keeping their vows?
- Why do men or women fail to keep the marriage vows?
- What can couples do to ensure they stick to the commitments made on their wedding day?

- Some of the wedding vows include, being faithful to each other, being caring and loving unconditionally. How does keeping these commitments help couples keep HIV from coming into their home?

Wrap-up the activity by sharing the following points with the group:

- The marriage vows you took are sacred and need to be understood very well, respected, remembered and fulfilled throughout the whole of your married life.
- Being faithful to each other, loving your partner and sticking to him or her can help prevent HIV from entering home.
- God/Allah created us all equal; there is no one who is superior to the other. Husbands and wives should look at each other as God/Allah's images

Prayer points:

Pray, as a couple, that:

- God will give you the strength and guidance to keep your marriage commitment.



Further reading:

Mathew 19:6

Ruth 1:16

Qur'an 4:25

Qur'an 2:27

Activity 5: Loving your spouse



Time:

30 Minutes



Activity overview:

Couples will be able to discuss the ways husbands and wives can show and express their love and appreciation for each other and how this can help prevent HIV from coming in the home.



Objectives:

- To help couples strengthen their love to each other by identifying specific ways they can show their love.



Instructions:

Step one: Introduce the activity: Explain to the group that it is important to show love and appreciation to your partner.

Step two: Divide couples into smaller groups of no more than 6 people in each group. Men and women should be in different groups. Explain to the group that they will be discussing the different ways they can show love to their partner.

Step three: Ask each group to discuss: What are the many ways you can show your spouse you love him/her?

Step four: Ask the groups to return to the large group to present back what they came up with.

Step five: After all the groups have presented, have the larger group discuss:

- Was there a difference in how men and women responded?
- What are ways both men and women can show their love to each other?

Step six: Wrap-up and summarize the activity by highlighting the following points

- There are many ways you can show love to each other, including: making their favorite meal, spending the day with them doing their favorite activity, complementing them on how nice they look, surprising each other with a small gift and saying I love you.
- Don't forget to do the little things that make each of you smile and feel loved.
- Make sure your partner knows how much you appreciate the little every day things they do, like doing the washing up or making the bed.

- If you sense something is wrong with your partner take time to embrace them and ask what the matter is. This may be the time they need your attention the most. Don't ignore that opportunity.
- Where there are misunderstandings in the family sit down and discuss with your partner. The Godly husband puts his family, and especially his wife, before all save God/ Allah Himself. The Godly wife puts her family, especially her husband before all save God/Allah himself.
- The prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said, every one of you is a shepherd and every one of you is responsible for those under his guardianship. The ruler is a shepherd, the man is a shepherd over his household and the woman is a shepherd over husband, house and the children.

Prayer points:

Pray, as a couple, that:

- God/ Allah is love and expects couples to love each other. Therefore, love and care for your partner in order to meet God/ Allah's expectations.
- God/ Allah will help you to have true unconditional love for your partner.
- God will help families to develop a culture of praying together.



Further reading:

1 Corinthians 13:1-13

Ephesians 5:25-29

Qur'an 30:21

The Prophet of Allah peace be upon was asked about which kind of things would mostly cause one to enter paradise ,and he answered,"Piety and goodmanners,"He also asked about which kind of that would cause one to enter Hell, and he said;The mouth(with its bad words)and the genitals (with adultery). (Al Trimidhii)



Summary and wrap-up



Time:

20 Minutes

Step one: Remind the group:

- Seeing marriage as a gift from God/ Allah will help to strengthen the love and respect couples have for each other.

Step two: Summarize the chapter:

- Point out that we have looked at some of the important steps that should be considered when improving ones relationship with his/her partner and with God/ Allah, which include:
 - Marriage is a gift from God/ Allah that should be honored by all.
 - There are many responsibilities for men and women and it is important to be able to share these within the home.
 - The vows made to each other are meant to be fulfilled throughout the marriage.
 - It is important to continue to express love for each other to show appreciation and care.

Homework:

Tell participants:

- Continue discussing these topics at home. Encourage couples to
- Remind each other of the vows that you made on your wedding day. Are you still keeping them?
- Discuss what each of you can do to start keeping them again.



Further reading:

- Qur'an 4:1,19,21
- Qur'an 4:34
- Qur'an 3:36
- Ephesians 5:22-29
- Genesis 1:26-28, 2:18, 23-25
- Psalms 127:1
- Hebrews 13:4

Chapter 3



Communication is a key to happiness

Communication is a two way process of sharing ideas, thoughts, intentions and/or aspirations. It involves sending or giving and receiving information. For couples in relationships, it involves talking to one another on likes and dislikes, wants, needs, thoughts and aspirations. It also includes sharing information on health matters.

Communication is an important aspect in any relationship. This chapter will look at communication and help couples understand the important role of communication in their relationship.

There are also participatory activities included in this chapter to help couples discuss the importance of communication, the negative effects of poor communication and the benefits of good communication for couples. The activities will help couples acquire skills to improve their communication.

Chapter overview

Audience:

This chapter is for those that are married.

Activities:

- Title
- Chapter overview
- Introducing chapter 3
- Looking more closely at cultural beliefs
- Happy life in marriage
- The role of good communication in marriage
- The four ways of communicating with your partner
- What happens when couples are not communicating
- Improving communication: Part 1
- Improving communication: Part 2- focus on listening
- Chapter wrap-up
- Home work
- Important verses



Time:

3 Hours 30 Minutes



Materials:

- Bible/ Qur'an
- Paper and pens



Preparations for the counselor:

- Read the whole session beforehand.
- Read the Bible/Qur'an verses related to the topic and other additional materials.
- Consider other references or quotes that may be useful in the session.



Introducing chapter 3



Time:

20 Minutes



Special note to the counselor:

Do step three and four if you are meeting for the first time. But if this is not the first time the group is coming together remind couples that they are supposed to actively participate in all the activities. Also remind them of the rules which you formed together with them.



Chapter overview :

Welcome couples to the group and point out that couples will discuss the topic of communication the key to happiness. They will look at how good communication can help strengthen their marriage bonds and how bad communication can break the marriage apart. They will also look at how communication between couples is related to HIV/AIDS.



Chapter objectives:

- To better understand the importance of communication between couples and how they can strengthen good communication in their relationship.
- To impart couples with good communication skills which can help them to effectively communicate with their partners.



Instructions:

Step one: Explain the topic of communication-the key to happiness by highlighting the following key points.

- Almost every marriage starts out as a huge celebration. Together with their family and friends, each couple is full of hopes and dreams for their future life together. But the road to happiness involves commitment and effort on the part of both the husband and wife.
- God/Allah's plan for marriage is that the two who have become one should live happily together. The home should be a little heaven on earth.
- In this session we will look at some of the important points to consider if we are to have a happy married life and the role that good communication plays in maintaining that happiness.
- We will also look at how communication between couples is related to HIV/AIDS.

Step two: Tell participants that:

- Couples will actively participate in each activity, not just listen. They will help guide the session by contributing information to discussions and participating in activities.

- Couples will be able to discuss feelings, values, and attitudes, as well as factual information.
- Couples will practice important skills to help strengthen their relationship with their partner

Step three: Find out from couples:

- What they are expecting to gain from participating in this group.
- List their responses and clarify if you feel they are beyond the scope of the sessions.

Step four: Ask couples:

- What rules should the group have to make sure no one is disrespected?
- Suggest any others that you feel are important and be sure to include confidentiality.

Step five: Conclude the activity using the following discussions points:

- Asking questions is an important part of participation.
- There is no right or wrong answer rather your past experiences, discussions and commitment to God/Allah will help determine the answers.

Activity 1: Looking more closely at cultural beliefs



Time:

20 minutes



Activity overview:

Couples will begin to look at some of the cultural beliefs or common misunderstandings in their community that may influence effective communication for couples. They will discuss whether these beliefs are true or false and identify what support can be given to better address these issues in their relationship.



Activity objectives:

- To identify various cultural beliefs and common misunderstandings that discourages open communication between couples.
- To provide true statements that support open communication between couples.



Instructions:

Step one: Tell couples: They will be discussing cultural beliefs and common myths about communication between couples. In looking more closely, we will begin to separate myth from fact.

Step two: Ask participants to mention some of the cultural beliefs, common sayings or myths related to communication a key to happiness in marriage. Allow time for discussions.

Step three: Some of the cultural beliefs, common sayings or myths people may come up with include the ones below. Read out to the group the ones that were not mentioned:

- Women are encouraged to be quiet and listen to their husband.
- Marriage issues are supposed to be kept as a secret, even if you are being abused.

Step four: Wrap up the discussion on the cultural beliefs, common sayings and myths with the following points:

- Communication is two ways, that is the husband and the wife should both be free to communicate.
- Men and women should be encouraged to openly communicate their feelings for a healthy married life.
- It is ok to seek counseling or involve a third party to help address marriage problems.

Prayer points:

Pray, as a couple, for:

- Husbands to love their wives and allow them have the right of speaking out their views.
- God/Allah to help couples give up of the cultural beliefs, myths and common sayings they have been holding to which are contrary to the word of God.



Verses for further reading:

Mathew 19:5-6

Genesis 1:27

Qur'an 2:228

Qur'an 30:21

Qur'an 39:6

The prophet Muhammad peace be upon him said: The world is the most amusement thing than world is pious woman,” In addition The prophet PBUH said “Who has been given a pious women ,Almighty Allah has helped him to fulfill half of his religion; and then it is your duty to fulfill the remaining half,”

Activity 2: Happy life in marriage



Time:

20 minutes



Activity overview:

Couples will begin to discuss how they can make their married life a happy one, which can last long. The activity will begin to look at communication as the most important factor for a happy married life.



Objectives:

- To help couples have happy married lives by discovering the key to it which is communication.



Instructions:

Step one: Explain to participants:

- Both men and women need to work at maintaining a loving and lasting marriage.
- A loving, respectful marriage where partners remain faithful to each other can help keep HIV from entering the home.

Step two: Read the story of a couple who celebrated their 50th anniversary to the group. Provide a handout if possible.

A couple who celebrated their 50th anniversary

A certain man and woman had been married for 50 years. As their 50th anniversary approached, they planned to have a small anniversary party. As they were planning for the event, they sat down and reflected on their varied experiences during their period of marriage and what enabled them to stay together as a couple for all this time.

Step three: Discuss the following questions with the group:

- What do you think were some of the things they talked about as they reflected on their 50 years of marriage?
- What do you think are some of the major reasons for their marriage to survive all these 50 years?
- Discuss how the reasons that helped their marriage survive all the 50 years can help prevent HIV from getting into the home?

Step four: Summarize the activity by sharing with the group the communication-related things they can do to help them have a happy married life and stay together for long. These include:

- Pray and read the word of God/ Allah together. A family that prays together, stays together.
- Take time out and spend a few moments together--just the two of you alone. Balance your work/business and life. Pay attention to your married life to ensure its success. Sometimes, you could get very much involved in your career and push married life to the background. Make an effort to prevent this from happening.
- Understand that men and women have different communication styles, emotional needs, and modes of behaviours. Recognizing this will help solve much of the conflict in your marriage.
- Know your partner well. When you are aware of your partner's dislikes, you can refrain from doing what will cause distress to your partner. This will assure your partner that you are considerate to him or her, a factor that is important in the successful achievement of marital harmony.
- Respect each other's views at all times if possible and make decisions together.
- Sincerely say "I love you" to each other.
- Don't use the secrets you share with each other as weapons during an argument
- Surprise each other with little gifts or tokens of appreciation. This will make the moment even more special. Gifts do not need to be extravagant or expensive, rather being thoughtful is the important thing.
- Remember that ideally and spiritually both of you are like two bodies and one soul when you hurt each other or you hurt yourself as well.
- Be patient with each other.
- It is difficult for HIV to get into the home if the above points are followed.

Prayer points:

Pray, as a couple, that:

- God will help couples to love each other so that you will have a happy married life.
- Couples will take the initiative to know each other well and avoid doing the things that irritate their partner.



Verses for further reading:

Proverbs 15:1

Ephesians 4:25

Qur'an 2:228

Qur'an 49:11, 13



Activity 3: The four types of communication- passive, aggressive, passive aggressive and assertive communication

**Time:**

30 Minutes

**Activity overview:**

Couples will continue to look at the importance of good communication in marriage and how it relates to HIV/AIDS. They will also look at the four types of communication, which are- passive aggressive, passive- aggressive and assertive -and will discuss which one is effective for a happy marriage.

**Objectives:**

- To encourage open, free communication among couples.
- To help couples decide the best way of communicating with their partner, recognizing the difference between passive, aggressive and assertive types of communication.

**Instructions:****Step one:** Introduce the activity:

- Explain that they will now look at four types of communication, which are - passive, aggressive, passive- aggressive and assertive.
- Remind them that the way they communicate with their partner(s) can help build their relationship and love for one another.

Step two: Explain to participants the four types of communication:

Passive communication – is a style in which individuals have developed a pattern of avoiding expressing their opinions or feelings, protecting their rights, and identifying and meeting their needs. Passive communicators tend to be quiet during a conflict, fail to express their feelings, needs, or opinions and tend to speak softly or apologetically. They might stop communicating, accept the blame, and “go along” with whatever the other person says to avoid a fight. Passive communicators listen, but do very little speaking. They give in to what others want – hoping to get what they actually want, without saying it. They let others make choices and decisions for them. This type of communication is usually born of low self-esteem.

These people do not respond overtly to hurtful or anger-inducing situations, instead, they allow grievances and annoyances to mount, usually unaware of the buildup. But once they have reached their high tolerance threshold for unacceptable behaviour, they are prone to explosive outbursts, which are usually out of proportion to the triggering

incident. After the outburst, however, they feel shame, guilt, and confusion, so they return to being passive and allow others to deliberately or inadvertently infringe on their rights.

Aggressive communication is a style in which individuals express their feelings and opinions and advocate for their needs in a way that violates the rights of others. Thus, aggressive communicators are verbally and sometimes physically abusive. Aggressive communication is born of low self-esteem (often caused by past physical and/or emotional abuse), unhealed emotional wounds, and feelings of powerlessness. They ignore the feelings and words of the other person and do not listen well. They are often angry and hurt people by the way that they speak. They make known all of their opinions through their actions and words.

They use humiliation to control, criticize, blame or attack others. They speak in a loud, damaging, and overbearing voice - act threateningly and rudely.

Passive - Aggressive communication is a style where the person communicates both passively and aggressively. They may look very passive and “go along” with the other person, but they communicate aggressively with their actions. They may refuse to speak to their partner, or do other subtle actions that they know will irritate their partner while pretending to be kind. The passive aggressive communicator does not show overt anger, but the anger comes out in his or her actions.

People who develop a pattern of passive-aggressive communication usually feel powerless, stuck, and resentful – in other words, they feel incapable of dealing directly with the object of their resentments. Instead, they express their anger by subtly undermining the object (real or imagined) of their resentments. They smile at you while setting traps all around you, they mutter to themselves rather than confront the person or issue, have difficulty acknowledging their anger and use facial expressions that don’t match how they feel - i.e., smiling when angry. Most of the time they deny there is a problem and appear cooperative while purposely doing things to annoy and disrupt.

Assertive communication is a style in which individuals clearly state their opinions and feelings, and firmly advocate for their rights and needs without violating the rights of others. Assertive communication is born of high self-esteem. People who communicate assertively decide what it is that they need and say it out clearly appropriately, and respectfully. They explain their feelings and opinions and ask for the things that they need. They do not speak too much or too little. They know what to say and say it. They use body language that is not threatening.

These individuals value themselves, their time, and their emotional, spiritual, and physical needs and are strong advocates for themselves while being very respectful of the rights of others. They do not allow others to abuse or manipulate them but stand up for their rights.

Step three: Ask the participants to reflect on the four types of communication. Give each person a piece of paper.

- Ask them to write which type of communication they usually use. They should not write their names but should indicate whether they are female or male.
- Collect the papers and share the responses with the group.
- Have the group discuss:
 - Did men seem to use one type of communication more than women? Did women seem to use one type of communication more than men?
 - What potential problems can happen in relationships if partners use different types of communication styles? How can these be resolved?
 - How can couples begin to use more effective assertive communication?

Step four: Wrap-up and summarize the activity by explaining:

- Assertive communicators are the most effective. They explain their feelings and opinions and ask for the things that they need without judgment.
- An example of assertive communication is an “I feel” statement.
- Effective communication can promote faithfulness by allowing couples to resolve conflicts and address their needs - so one or both partners do not go outside the home looking for someone else who appears to understand them better.
- Effective communication can help strengthen our love relationship – speaking truth in love.

Prayer points:

Pray, as a couple, that:

- God/ Allah will help you to be patient with each other’s weaknesses.
- You will be able to learn to communicate with your partner in a loving and respectful way.

Verses for further reading:



Proverbs 15:1

Ephesians 4:25

Qur'an 42:43

Qur'an 3:159

Qur'an 2:263

The Prophet Muhammad peace be upon him said: The best of you is the one who is amicable and tolerant to his family and I am the most amicable from among you all towards my family people”

Activity 4: The role of good communication in marriage- “You” and “I feel” statements



Time:

30 Minutes



Special preparations for the counselor:

- Print out the scenarios at the end of the activity for group discussions. Make sure you print enough copies for the group.



Activity overview:

Couples will discuss the role of good communication between couples and what the negative effects bad communication can bring in the home. They will also discuss how they can communicate effectively and positively with their partners and how this relates to HIV/AIDS.



Objectives:

- To help couples appreciate the role of good communication.
- To encourage couples to discuss how they can make use of communication in their relationship.
- To help couples learn how to effectively communicate with their partners to avoid potential conflicts and being judgmental.



Instructions

Step one: Explain to participants that you will now look more closely at communication.

- Communication can be a challenge in all human relationships, especially with couples. On the other hand, the happiness of a couple can be measured to a large degree by the effectiveness of their communication.
- How couples communicate is a powerful factor that affects the success or the failure of a relationship.
- Communication should go beyond verbalizing feelings to include nonverbal communication like good listening, eye contact and positive or negative body language.

Step two: Read out the scenarios at the end of the activity to the people. Ask participants to listen attentively.

Step three: After you have read the scenarios, ask the participants:

- How do the first statements (“you” statements) differ from the second statements (“I feel” statements)?
- What body actions can one see with “you” statements? With “I feel” statements?
- What is the likely response to the statements above?

Step four: Tell participants that they will now do small group work. Divide participants into couples and explain the following:

- Prepare two clean and clear “I feel” statements relating to one or two of the following scenarios that you will be given.
- If some of the participants are not literate, read the scenarios a few times until everyone has selected one for practice.
- Allow the groups to practice. Facilitators need to go around to the different pairs and observe. Coach them on their “I feel” statements.

Scenarios

- Your partner likes to listen to the radio/TV at night and you are unable to sleep.
- Your partner does not take care of his/her appearance (hygiene) and it embarrasses you.
- Your partner’s relatives are coming from another town/village and he/she did not tell you in advance.
- Your partner left raw meat on the table and now you have rodents/bugs in the house.

Step five: Ask participants to share with the group their “I feel” statements.

- Encourage the group to give suggestions for improvement and add any comments after each person shares.

Step six: Continue with the large group discussion by asking the following:

- Have you learned anything new?
- How can you use this information to avoid or resolve conflict?
- How can you use this new information to strengthen your relationship?
- How can good communication help prevent HIV from entering home?

Step seven: Summarize the activity by pointing out the following key issues:

- The “you” statements carry blame and annoy the listener. These types of statements are judgmental, accuse the listener, demand something and make the listener feel cornered and defensive.
- “I feel” statements open the opportunity for discussion and leaves the next move for the other person. They are less likely to demand or blame.
- Body language also differs between “I feel” statements and “you” statements. “You” statements – finger pointing, furrowed brow, hands on hips. “I feel” statements – person is standing firmly on both feet looking the person in the face (if culturally appropriate), but not showing anger or rage.
- When using “I feel” statements, do not demand something of the other person. You may offer some solutions, but you must also ask the other person for their ideas about how to solve the problem.
- Good communication entails that the two openly share with each other their likes and dislikes, their fears, plans and desires. This will help to strengthen love between the couples. If the two love each other they will avoid doing things that will hurt the other like being unfaithful thereby preventing HIV from coming into the home.

- Good communication and openness also strengthens the love between couples and helps maintain their commitment to each other. This also helps prevent HIV from entering the home.

Prayer points:

Pray, as a couple, that:

- You will be able to understand the crucial role of communication in your relationship.
- God/Allah will help you to freely communicate with each other.



Verses for further reading:

Proverbs 15:1

Ephesians 4:25

Qur'an 3:159

Qur'an 2:263

Qur'an 49:11-13

The Prophet Muhammad peace be upon him said: The best of you is the one who is amicable and tolerant to his family and I am the most amicable from among you all towards my family people”

Scenarios for activity three:

“You” statements- Man to Woman:

“You are so lazy, you never keep the house swept, you are always late with my food and the children are always crying and dirty. I don’t know why I married you. You must start to work harder from now on.”

“You” statements- Woman to Man:

“You always come home very late. You never give me any money to buy food. You don’t help me to take care of the children. I don’t know why I even stay with you. You must change your behavior from now on!”

“I feel” statements- Man to Woman:

“When I come home I feel disappointed if the food is not ready and the house not swept, the children are just crying and dirty. I would like us to discuss how we can arrange things better so that there is harmony in the house when I come home.

“I feel” statements- Woman to Man:

“When you come home very late at night, I feel disappointed because I would like to see more of you, and I would like some money for food for the children. I would like us to discuss how we can arrange things better.

Activity 5: What happens when couples are not communicating?



Time:

30 Minutes



Activity overview:

Couples will begin to look at what happen to couples when they are not communicating and how this relates to HIV/AIDS. They will also discuss how the absence of communication can negatively affect love and trust for each other.



Objectives:

- To help couples understand the negative effects of not communicating.
- To encourage open, free communication among couples.



Instructions:

Step one: Introduce the activity:

- Explain that communication is very important.
- Just as having good communication in a relationship can strengthen a marriage, bad or no communication can have a negative impact on a marriage.

Step two: As a large group, ask participants to brainstorm on the following issues (allow for enough time for discussion and encourage couples to participate):

- What can happen when there is no effective communication between couples? Let them give examples they know.
- How can no or poor communication affect intimacy, trust, growth or bring HIV/AIDS in the relationship?

Step three: Wrap up the activity and summarize the following key points:

- A breakdown in communication often spells doom to the marriage. It eats at the foundation of the union in a number of different ways, destroying the couple's ability to function together.
- When communication breaks down you are less likely to know your partner's needs. This makes one or both partners unhappy and more likely to go outside the marriage, making it easier for HIV to enter the home.
- Communication helps the relationship to develop and may need to change as people change throughout the marriage.
- The following are some of the things that can happen when there is communication breakdown in marriage:

- **Insecurity:** Without proper communication, couples are unable to reassure one another, exacerbating existing insecurities.
- **Secrecy:** Lack of communication means that fewer problems are being vetted and discussed and that some, by default, are being kept secret from one partner or the other.
- **Trust:** Unspoken words indicate a lack of trust, as each partner is unwilling to open up about certain feelings.
- **Distance:** Couples who do not speak to each other become more distant by default. Becoming more distant will likely lead to loss of intimacy, which can really make a marriage suffer. One or both partners may look for and find others in whom they can confide more readily. This increases the risk of HIV entering the home.
- **Complacency:** Without communication, the marriage cannot grow and evolve to adapt to new circumstances. Complacency eventually sets in and with it comes stagnation.

Prayer points:

Pray as couples, for:

- Improved communication between each other so that you are able to meet the many challenges marriage presents and be able to stay together.



Verses for further reading:

Proverbs 15:1

Ephesians 4:25

Qur'an 42:43

Activity 6: Improving communication-Part 1



Time:

30 Minutes



Activity overview:

Couples will continue to look at how they can effectively communicate with their partners by taking into consideration some factors, which are important such as time spent together. They will also look at non-verbal communication and how they can use it to express love to each other. They will continue to look at how communication is related to HIV/AIDS.



Objectives:

- To help couples understand the importance of communicating at the right time and place.
- To help couples appreciate the role of non-verbal communication in strengthening love between couples.



Instructions:

Step one: Explain to participants:

- This session is going to continue to look at communication.
- Couples will begin to examine how they each communicate with each other both verbally and non-verbally.

Step two: Tell the couples that we are going to do a role-play. Explain the following directions for the activity.

- Volunteers will be selected from the group. These volunteers should be couples.
- Each couple will be asked to prepare a role-play based on the information given, which they will present to the group.
- Couples will be given 15 minutes to prepare their role-play. The other members can sing or do another energizer type of activity. They should not know the type of role play assignment given to the other couples.

Step three: Ask for volunteers (2 couples) from the group who will prepare and present the role-plays that will be used for discussions in this activity. Provide the following scenarios to the couples:

- Ask one of the spouses to tell the other that s/he does not like the way her/his partner has dressed. S/he should do it in a loving way, at the right time and place without annoying her/his partner.
- Ask the other couple to do it a negative way- in away to annoy or to put off the other partner. S/he should be emotional, speak in a harsh way and at a wrong time and place i.e. in the presence of other people.
- The other couple should use non-verbal communication to do the same.

Step four: Ask the couples to make presentations. After the presentation ask the group to discuss the following:

- What did they observe about the communication between the couples?
- Was the communication effective in both situations?
- What contributed to successful communication in one couple? What made the other couple unsuccessful in their communication?
- What could they have done differently to get their viewpoints across better and not upset their partner?

Step five: Wrap-up the discussion, highlighting the following key points:

- Each one of us should check how we communicate with our spouses and should make efforts to improve our communication.
- If they only want to fight, any time is good. If we want to make things better, then, the timing and the words have to be carefully chosen. Communication among couples starts with understanding each other's sensitivities.
- One of the most difficult problems when a couple is very busy is finding the time to talk. Make sure you sense the right time to communicate whatever it is you need to communicate with your spouse. For example, if they have had a long busy day at work, you may want to wait until the weekend to say what it is on your mind. If they are very tired and too upset to talk, you should wait until they are calm and the anger has subsided.
- When communicating with your spouse, choose the right tone, voice pitch, volume and speed. The tone of voice can draw your mate towards you or push your mate away.
- Voice pitch, volume, tone, speed, number and length of pauses, stammering intensity and emotion all give meaning to what you are saying far beyond the words themselves. Two people can say the same sentence yet each sentence is delivered and received differently due to the intonation that accompanies the message.
- The volume as well can be soothing or irritating. Bear in mind that your voice can transmit cold, uncaring messages of indifference or it can transmit love, care and warmth.
- Remember that good communication can help prevent HIV/AIDS in the home.

Step six: Share with participants the other important part of communication, which is non-verbal communication. Explain the following to participants:

- Non-verbal behavior can carry more weight than the words they say. Non-verbal communication includes: touching, looking into each other's eyes etc. Warmth could be communicated by taking hold of, stroking, or even pressing a partners hand at your lips.
- Other non-verbal communication includes: handshake, embrace, fist, slammed door, thrown objects, un upturned thumb, a pat on the back, a sigh, a tear running down the cheek, open laughter and heavy sighs, etc.
- Facial expression is part of body language and the eyes are the most expressive part of the face. One's shiftiness, narrowing, widening, a slow roll, dullness and rate of blinking all tell the mood of the person.

- Body language helps to better understand the meaning of a message beyond words.
- All body positions either support or deny a verbal message. The distance between the people when they are communicating may mean intimacy or not. Touching shows you are paying attention, it affirms, heals, lifts up.
- In addition to receiving divine assistance, the simple, humbling act of asking for help from the Lord softens hearts and makes communication easier. Pray together as a couple and ask that you be inspired to find creative solutions to the issues at hand.

Prayer points:

Pray, as a couple, that:

- You will be able to express love to each even through the use of non-verbal communication.
- You will be able to find it easier to communicate your feelings with each other.



Verses for further reading:

1 Sam 3:9

Qur'an 49:12

Qur'an 104:1

The Prophet Muhammad peace be upon him said: You must have a firm and permanent hope in Almighty Allah until your time of death approaches.

Activity 7: Improving communication: Part 2- Focus on listening



Time:

30 Minutes



Activity overview:

Couples will discuss the importance of listening in communication and how this can encourage open communication between couples. They will also look at the deeper meaning of listening and learn how they can show their partner that they are listening to what she or he is saying.



Objectives:

- To help couples understand the deeper meaning and appreciate the importance of listening when their partner is speaking.
- To encourage couples to pay attention and listen attentively when their partner is speaking to them.



Instructions:

Step one:

Explain to participants:

- Listening is one of the most important parts of good communication. As such, spouses should practice being good listeners.
- Listening is not always easy but it is a skill that can be learned.

Step two:

Divide the participants into couples. Explain the following directions:

- One person should tell about an experience in their life that made them very happy.
- The other person should first listen intently but then stop listening completely.
- They should then switch.
- The groups should then discuss the following:
 - How did they feel when their partner was listening to them?
 - How did they feel when their partner wasn't listening?
 - What could they do to listen more lovingly to each other?

Step three:

Bring the groups back together to discuss what they learned.

Step four:

Wrap-up the activity and summarize the key points:

- Listening involves more than hearing words. It involves observing non-verbal cues, showing you care, making eye contact, watching for underlying motives,

asking the right questions, giving appropriate responses and sometimes being silent.

- It is important to listen to your partner and also tell them how you feel. You deserve your spouse's utmost honesty and your spouse deserves the same.
- Total listening should involve every part of the body.
- Focus your attention on your partner. Turn off the television and put down the newspaper. When somebody looks you in the eye, it conveys confidence and builds trust in the relationship.
- Sit attentively- Act as if nothing else in the world matters except hearing your partner out. Block all distractions from your mind. Learn forward in your chair as if you are hanging on every word.
- Act interested in what you are about to hear-Raise your eyebrows, nod your head in agreement, smile or laugh when appropriate.
- Ask well-phrased questions and give encouragement by asking questions that illustrate your interest.
- Never interrupt-Just when you think you are through listening, listen thirty seconds longer.
- Listen more carefully than you think you need to - Before moving on to discussing a solution, make sure you really understand what your partner is saying.
- Many times the greatest stress with communication in marriage simply comes from feeling that you are not being heard.

Prayer points:

Pray, as a couple, that:

- You will come to understand that listening or paying attention is crucial when your partner is speaking.
- You will acquire the skills and patience needed to truly listen to each other.



Verses for further reading:

Qur'an 3:103, 105

James 1:19



Chapter summary and wrap-up

**Time:**

20 Minutes

**Instructions:**

Step one: Remind couples:

- Understanding the importance of communication between couples will help improve communication with each other.

Step two: Summarize the chapter:

- Point out the following important points about communication between couples which have been discussed in the chapter. These include:
 - Open effective communication is very important in a loving marriage and can help to make their married life a happy one and one that will last long.
 - Improving communication involves choosing the right time, place and the right words to use when communicating.
 - A breakdown in communication often spells doom to the marriage. It eats at the foundation of the union in a number of different ways, destroying the couple's ability to function together.
 - Non-verbal behavior carries more weight than the words they say. It can be used to communicate and express love to each other. However, if not properly used it can destroy the relationship.
 - Listening when your partner is speaking helps to communicate to your partner your interest in what s/he is saying.
 - Emphasize the point that when there is good communication between couples, it can help in preventing HIV to come in the home. When there is no good communication, one or both spouses may seek out someone with whom they feel they can better communicate. This can lead to intimacy outside the home and the risk of HIV entering the marriage.

Homework:

Tell participants to continue discussing the topic at home. Encourage couples to:

- Take time to discuss how they have been communicating.
- How they intend to change so that their communication will be more effective.

**Verses for further reading:**

Proverbs 15:2; 15:28; 16:23

Matt. 12:34-37

Colossians 4:6

James 1:19

Mateyu 6:6

1 Thessalonians 5:17

Qur'an 4:129

Qur'an 30:21

Qur'an 16:90

Chapter 4



Sex in marriage is a gift from God

Sex is a gift from God, it is God's wedding gift and there is need for it to be enjoyed by both. Sexual satisfaction is a result of a loving expression with one's spouse, and the manner of that expression is not dictated. Both husband and wife should learn how they can satisfy each other during sex since sexual satisfaction is for both husband and wife. It is not only for the woman to satisfy the husband.

Sexual intercourse is also a means of communicating at the deepest level. In this chapter we will focus on how couples can make their sex life a truly enjoyable one. There are also participatory activities to help couples understand that sex is a gift for married couples and the importance of communication in relation to sex.

Chapter overview

Audience:

This chapter is for those that are married

Activities:

- Title
- Chapter overview
- Introducing chapter 4
- Looking more closely at cultural beliefs
- Sex in marriage as a gift from God/ Allah
- Communication and sex
- How to make sex loving and pleasurable
- Chapter wrap-up
- Homework
- Important verses



Time:

1 Hour 55 Minutes



Materials:

- Bible/ Qur'an
- Paper and pens



Preparations for the counselor:

- Read the whole session before hand.
- Read the Bible/Quran verses related to the topic and other additional materials.
- Consider other references or quotes that may be useful in the session.

Introducing chapter 4



Time:

20 Minutes



Special note to the counselor:

Do step two, three and four if you are meeting for the first time. But if this is not the first time the group is coming together remind couples that they are supposed to actively participate in all the activities. Also remind them of the rules which you formed together with them.



Chapter overview:

Welcome couples to the group and point out that they will have the opportunity to discuss the topic of Sex in Marriage a gift from God/ Allah. They will look at the importance of sex communication and how they can sexually satisfy each other. Couples will also look at how poor sex communication and lack of sexual satisfaction can bring HIV/AIDS in the home.



Chapter objectives:

- To better understand the importance of sex in marriage being a gift from God/ Allah.
- To help couples be more open about discussing sexual intimacy with their partner.
- To help couples to be committed to meeting each other's sexual needs.



Instructions:

Step one: Explain the topic by highlighting the following points about sex in marriage as a gift from God/ Allah:

- Sex is God/Allah's wedding gift to every married couple and is a beautiful gift.
- It is a means of communicating at the deepest level.
- Sexual intercourse between a husband and wife is honorable and is a dignified act. For this reason, it must be done respectfully and lovingly.
- For a woman to enjoy sex, she needs to feel wanted and loved.

Step two: Tell participants that:

- Couples will actively participate in each activity, not just listen. They will help guide the session by contributing information to discussions and participating in activities.
- Couples will be able to discuss feelings, values, and attitudes, as well as factual information.
- Couples will practice important skills to help strengthen their relationship with their partner.

Step three: Find out from couples:

- What they are expecting to gain from participating in this group.



- List their responses and clarify if you feel they are beyond the scope of the sessions.

Step four: Ask couples:

- What rules should the group have to make sure no one is disrespected?
- Suggest any others that you feel are important and be sure to include confidentiality.

Step five: Conclude the activity using the following points:

- Asking questions is an important part of participation.
- There is no right or wrong answer, rather their experience, discussions and commitment to God/Allah will help determine the answers.



Activity 1: Looking more closely at cultural beliefs

**Time:**

20 minutes

**Activity overview:**

Couples will begin to look at some of the cultural beliefs or common misunderstandings in a community around sex in marriage. They will discuss whether these beliefs are true or false and identify what support can be given to better address these issues in their relationship.

**Objectives:**

- To identify various cultural beliefs and common misunderstandings around sex in marriage.
- To provide true statements that support couples to enjoy sex in marriage.

**Instructions:**

Step one: Tell couples: They will be discussing cultural beliefs and common sayings and myths about sex in marriage. In looking more closely, we will begin to separate myth from fact.

Step two: Ask participants to mention some of the cultural beliefs, common sayings and myths related to sex in marriage, which is a gift from God. Allow time for discussions.

Step three: Some of the cultural beliefs, common sayings and myths people may come up with include the ones below. Read out to the group the ones that were not mentioned:

- Women should make sure they sexually satisfy their husbands.
- Women should always say yes when the man wants sex, even if they have good reasons not to do so.
- Women should always be at the receiving end, they should not initiate sex in the home or propose new styles.
- A woman should put red beads or ribbon on the bed when menstruating.
- Men need to not put in efforts to sexually satisfy their wives because they believe that they already know everything.
- Circumcised men, women with pulled labia, or women with beads are better in bed than those without.

Step four: Wrap up the discussion on the cultural beliefs, common misunderstandings and myths with the following points:

- Sex in marriage is a gift God/ Allah has given to married couples. It should be enjoyed by all. Therefore, both men and women should be able to initiate sex, not only the husband.
- Enjoying sex has to do with the mind. If the mind is not occupied by other things but concentrates on the activity being done, individuals are more likely to be satisfied. If one is truly being loving and trying to please their partner, they are more likely to be satisfied too. Therefore, it is not true that circumcised men, women with pulled labia and those with beads around their waist are better than others.
- Men and women should discuss their sexual preferences for maximum sexual satisfaction rather than going outside the relationship. This will help prevent HIV in the home and strengthen love for one another.

Prayer points:

Pray, as a couple, that:

- You will be able to overcome negative cultural practices and beliefs that are contrary to the word of God/Allah, especially those that leave men and women unfulfilled and unhappy.
- You will be able to be open about sex with each other so that you can better satisfy your partner's needs.



Verses for further reading:

Qur'an 16:4

Qur'an 7:89

Qur'an 2:228

Genesis 2:25

The Prophet Muhammad peace be upon him said : The true believer is the one who has good manners, and the best among them, are those who have good characters to their wives.

Activity 2: Sex in marriage is a gift from God/Allah



Time:

20 Minutes



Special preparations for a counselor:

- This is a very sensitive topic as such some might not participate actively.
- Decide beforehand as to how you will make sure that everybody participates.
- You can also discuss with the group which are the best words to use when mentioning something sensitive.



Materials:

- Glasses or transparent bottles
- Water



Activity overview:

Couples will begin to look at sex as a gift that God/Allah gave to married people and will discuss how they can honor this gift that has been given to them. This will be related to HIV/AIDS.



Objectives:

- To help couples understand that God/ Allah expects them to honor sex, the gift He has given to them by being faithful to their partners.



Instructions:

Step one: Introduce the activity: Explain that sex in marriage is a gift from God/ Allah and one that should be respected and honored.

Step two: Fill three glasses or bottles with water. Referring to each, explain the following:

I have brought three glasses (or bottles) of water with me. One glass of water was taken from a well in a village where there is a cholera outbreak. The other two glasses contain water that is clean and free of cholera. As you know, within 1 to 5 days of drinking water with cholera you will develop severe diarrhea.

But let us say that you are very thirsty. It is a warm day and you would like a drink. However, you are really concerned about cholera and you want to avoid getting sick. You do not know which glass contains the cholera bacteria, because you cannot tell by looking at the glass. But you are still very thirsty...

Step three: Ask participants which choice is the best choice?

- Refrain from drinking until you go home and can get water from your own well, a source that you know is clean.
- Wait for a few hours, and then drink from one glass.
- Drink a little bit from each glass. You are very thirsty.

Step four: Ask the group the following questions, allowing time for discussion:

- What can we learn from this story?
- What are the benefits of honoring God/ Allah's gift?

Step five: Wrap-up the activity and summarize the following key points:

- Only choice A (drinking from your own well) will give you 100% confidence that you will not get cholera. Choice B (adding another sexual partner) and choice C (having multiple partners) both have a risk of infection.
- Being faithful to your partner is one way of honoring the gift of sex that God/ Allah gave to married people. Mutual faithfulness is also the only choice that gives 100% protection from sexually transmitted HIV infection. Just as we can make wise choices about the water that we drink, we also need to make wise choices about our sexuality. Drink from your own well.
- Sex is a beautiful way for couples to express their love for each other.
- Husbands and wives who honor God/Allah's gift will have a long lasting healthy marriage.
- When God/Allah's gift is not honored, there may be tension in the home and one or more of the partners may seek sex outside the marriage. This can bring HIV into the home.

Prayer points:

Pray, as a couple, that:

- You can follow God/Allah's example to truly love each other, and to break the bonds of oppression over women. Give men the courage to live differently and to mirror the love of God/Allah to their wives.
- You will better understand that sex is a gift of God/ Allah for married couples. Pray that you will be open and free with each other.
- You will have the strength to resist temptation and drink only from your well.



Verses for further reading:

Song of Songs 4:9-16

Ruth 3:3

Proverbs 5:15-21

Qur'an 16:4

Qur'an 7:89

Activity 3: Communication and sex



Time:

35 Minutes



Special preparations for the counselor:

- Read again the session on the importance of good communication in a marriage.
- This is a very sensitive topic as such some might not participate actively.
- Decide beforehand as to how you will make sure everybody participates.
- You can also discuss with the group the best words to use when mentioning something sensitive.



Activity overview:

Couples will look at how they can communicate their sexual needs to their partners and how this can help them have a satisfying sexual life. They will also look at how lack of communication about sex can cause unfaithfulness between couples and bring HIV in the home.



Objectives:

- To encourage couples to communicate their sexual needs openly and freely with their partners.



Instructions:

Step one: Briefly remind participants about the discussion in the previous session about the importance of good communication in a marriage:

- Tell them communication is especially important for a healthy sexual life.
- Remind them that sex for married people is a gift from God/Allah and should be enjoyed by both. Both husband and wife should learn how they can satisfy each other during sex.

Step two: Ask Participants to reflect upon their own experience and how they communicate with their partners when it comes to sex. They should think about it and write down their answers and hand them in without mentioning their names but should indicate whether they are female or male. (You can go over them with the group without knowing who wrote what):

- Are you free to discuss issues to do with sex with your partner?
- Are you comfortable to tell your partner how you want to be handled during sex?
- Are you comfortable to ask your partner for sex or do you always wait for your partner to initiate?
- How do you communicate about wanting to try a new approach or position during sexual intercourse?

- Are you able to communicate with your partner if you don't feel sexually satisfied?

Step three: Thinking about their self-reflection, ask the group to brainstorm around the following questions

- Why is it sometimes difficult to talk with one's spouse about sex?
- What can husbands and wives do to better communicate their feelings about sex and their sex life as a couple?

Step four: Wrap-up the activity and summarize the key points:

- Communicating about sexual needs is very important. Several surveys have identified that effectiveness in conveying one's preferences and feelings about sex is the key to a good sex life.
- Couples should talk about their sexual needs if they are to enjoy their sexual life. If you don't communicate, your partner will not know what pleases you and if you are satisfied.
- Communicating about sex can be hard for both people –one may feel embarrassed to bring up the topic or be afraid of how their spouse will act, another may feel they are being criticized and not be able to listen.
- Genuine intimacy must be achieved outside the bedroom before it can be achieved inside. Healthy sexual satisfaction results from harmony in other areas of the relationship. If there are problems between the two, it will show up in their sex life.
- As with all good communication, make sure to find the right time and setting to talk about what you want to say. Express how you are feeling, such as "I would appreciate if you would..." instead of "How come you never...." Never make fun of or criticize your partner for talking about intimate topics.
- If you have a trusting open relationship, you will be able to communicate with your spouse about anything.
- Lack of communication about sex is one of the main reasons men and women seek partners outside the marriage, which can bring HIV into the home.
- It can be difficult to have a loving sex life when:
- Couples are not being loving outside the bedroom.
- Couples find it difficult to communicate about what pleases them.
- Couples are not willing to try new things.
- Sexual satisfaction is for both husband and wife. It is not only for the woman to satisfy the husband. This is important to bear in mind given our cultural background as we often hear the bride (at bridal showers) being counseled on how to satisfy her husband while little is being said to the husband on his reciprocal role.

Prayer points:

Pray, as a couple, that:

- You will be open with each other and discuss your sexual preferences without fear and shame.
- You will have the courage to have open and honest communication, and build meaningful relationships.



Verses for further reading:

Song of Songs 7:1-9

1 Corinthians 7:4-5

Genesis 2:25

Qur'an 53:45-46

Qur'an 7:89

The prophet Muhammad peace be upon him said: when one of his companion Jabir married to a widow:-“Why did you not marry a virgin with whom you could play and who could play with you”



Activity 4: How to make sex loving and pleasurable



Time:

20 Minutes



Special preparations for the counselor:

- This activity can be a bit sensitive and can make some uncomfortable to freely participate.
- Decide beforehand as to how you will make sure that everybody participates.
- You can also discuss with the group the best words to use when mentioning something sensitive.
- During this session, participants may bring up some commonly held beliefs and practices that prohibit sex in marriage at certain times and for various reasons. It is not appropriate in these sessions to debate whether these practices are correct. The main point to reinforce is that any decision to abstain from sex within a marriage should be made mutually with the agreement of both the husband and wife.



Activity overview:

Couples will discuss how they can make their sexual life more pleasurable and the things that can prevent them from enjoying sex with each other.



Objectives:

- To help couples learn how they can make their sexual life loving and pleasurable.
- To give a chance to couples to discuss things that can prevent them from enjoying sex with each other and how to avoid those things.



Instructions:

Step one: Introduce the activity: Explain that this session will be about making love and sex more pleasurable through open and honest communication.

Step two: Divide participants into groups of men and women and ask them to discuss the following:

- What are some of the things that prevent us (women/men) from enjoying sex with our partners? How can we avoid these?
- What do we want our partners to do to make our sex life the most enjoyable moment?
- What are the sensitive areas in our bodies which help us to be aroused when touched?

Step three: Have each group report back what they decided on and discuss in plenary.

Step four: Wrap-up the discussion and summarize the key points:

- Sex is most enjoyable when there is love and trust in the relationship.
- Openly discuss with your spouse how you would like to be handled during sex. Open communication is a key to a more enjoyable and satisfying sexual life.
- Make use of different styles and approaches and do not be afraid to try out new things or feel it is “wrong.” Most married people complain of monotony of sexual style, which in some cases leads to loss of the initial excitement and interest. This may lead to one or both spouses looking for this excitement outside the home which increases the risk of HIV entering the marriage. Couples should be encouraged to make use of many styles when having sex.
- Husbands and wives should take time to prepare each other until they are ready for sex. They should all know that men and women can get aroused at different times and with different stimulation. Many times a woman may take longer than a man to be aroused. Let them be sensitive to each other’s needs. Men should learn to hold themselves and wait until their wife is ready for entry. This will help both of them to enjoy the act.
- When a couple is preparing for and actually having sexual intercourse, the mind should not be disturbed by thinking of other things such as personal or family problems, work plans etc. The mind needs to concentrate on the sexual act itself from the beginning to the end, otherwise the act is in danger of having a premature ending or may fail completely. If the mind is disturbed, it switches off, so too the heart. Eventually, the body will cool off, and the sexual excitement vanishes.

Step five: Let participants also know the following important points about sex:

- The use of sex to relieve tension or to end misunderstandings should be avoided. Before sex, couples must resolve their anger. Withholding sex can be a nonverbal way of punishing each other or expressing anger. Unexpressed anger may result in failure to get aroused.
- It is important to respect the conjugal rights of each partner. But sometimes a partner may have good reasons for not wanting to have sex – i.e. they don’t feel well, or they are very tired. The other partner should be understanding and not force their spouse to have sex.
- However, when sexual intercourse fails several times in a family setting, this can indicate deeper problems in the marriage as well as raise suspicion of the spouse’s integrity and fidelity.
- Sexual desires can change over time or depending on circumstances. For example a woman going through menopause may be less interested in sex or a man very stressed at work may not be able to relax and enjoy sex. Be sensitive to each other’s needs and remember to always discuss how you are feeling.
- Each couple has the capacity to creatively develop their own sexual adventure. Dependence on other visual aids or pornography should be avoided as these would divert attention from your spouse to the models that are used in these visual presentations.

- In Islam, marriage is not restricted to a platonic relationship between husband and wife, nor is it solely for procreation. The Islamic term for marriage, “Nikah” literally means sexual intercourse. Islam fully understands that sexual instincts cannot and must not be repressed. They can only be regulated for the well being of human beings in this life and for their success in the hereafter. When a couple learns the meaning of genuine love and practice mutual respect and trust, then they can expect a mutually satisfying sexual experience.
- In Islam also it is totally forbidden to do anal and oral sex. Sex should only be done through the vagina. Kissing and caressing is allowed.

Prayer points:

Pray, as a couple, that:

- You will find sex with your partner more pleasurable and you will not deny each other sex just as the bible says.
- You will have the courage to be open and honest about sex in order to build a more meaningful relationship.



Verses for further reading:

1 Corinthians 7:4-5

Genesis 2:25, 26:5

Qur'an 7:89

Qur'an 2:223



Chapter summary and wrap-up

**Time:**

20 Minutes

**Instructions:**

Step one: Remind couples that sex for married people is a gift from God/ Allah and it is the responsibility of both partners to honor this gift.

Step two: Summarize the chapter, point out some of the important things that have been discussed which can help couples have a satisfying sexual life, which include:

- Couples should openly discuss with each other how they would like to be handled during sex. Open communication is a key to a more enjoyable and satisfying sexual life.
- Genuine intimacy must be achieved outside the bedroom before it can be achieved inside. Healthy sexual satisfaction results from harmony in the other areas of the relationship. If there are problems between the two, it will show up in their sex life.
- If couples are satisfied sexually they will not involve themselves in extra marital relationships thereby preventing HIV from coming in the home.

Homework:

Tell participants to continue discussing the topic at home. Encourage couples to discuss:

- If they are both sexually satisfied with each other
- If yes, how they will maintain it
- If not, discuss how they will make their sexual life more pleasurable and satisfying.

**Verses for further reading:**

Deuteronomy 5; 18

Song of Solomon 4:16

Rom 12:10

Proverbs 5: 19

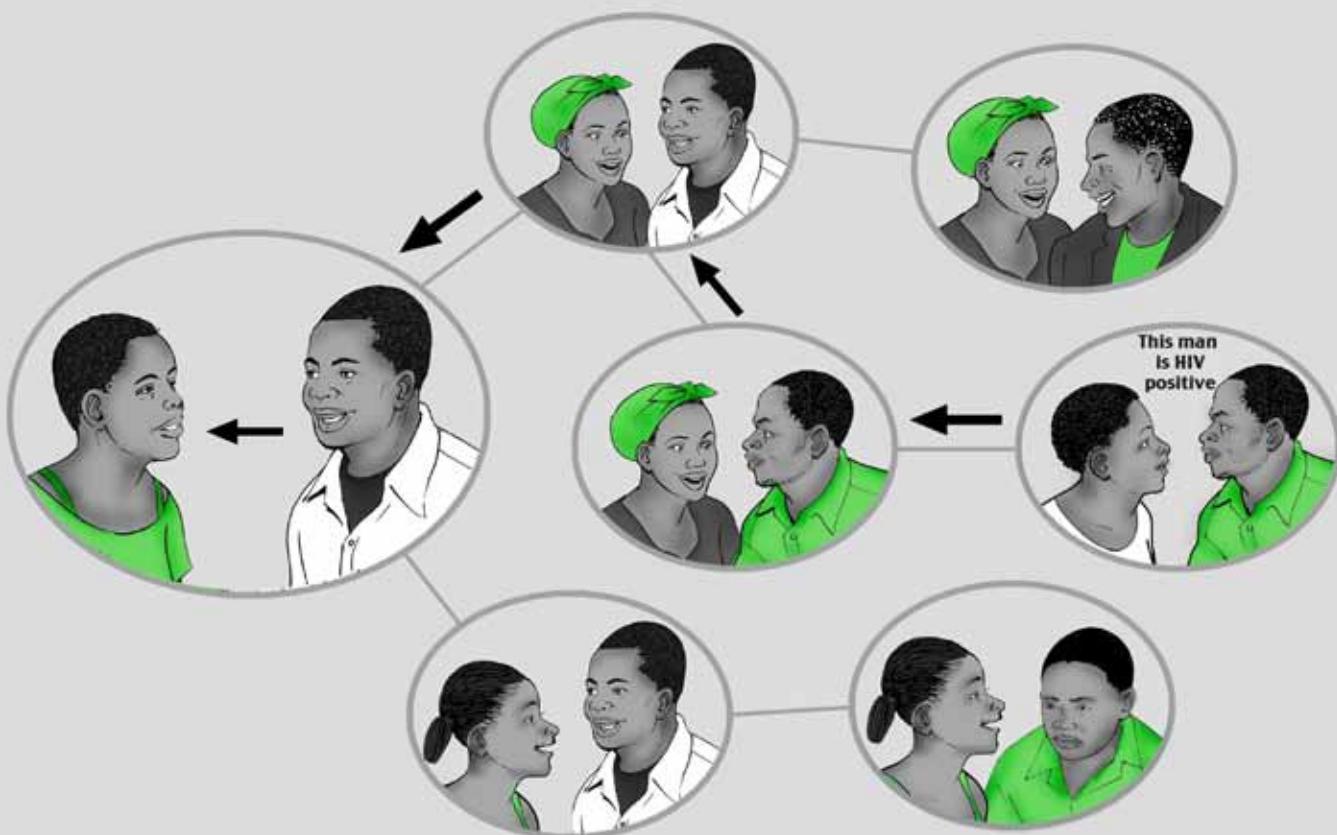
Qur'an 77:20-23

Qur'an 23:12-14

The prophet Muhammad peace be upon him said: To satisfy sex on one's spouse is an act of charity. We shall be rewarded by Allah.



Chapter 5



Sex outside marriage

Extramarital relationships are one of the problems that are affecting marriages. This chapter will help couples understand the causes of this behavior and its consequences.

The participatory activities that have been included in the session will help couples discuss and role play the effects of extramarital relationships and the risks of involvement in Multiple Concurrent Partnerships. The couples will also discuss how they can overcome this problem and remain faithful to each other.



Chapter overview

Audience:

This chapter is meant for those that are married

Activities:

- Title
- Chapter overview
- Introducing chapter 5
- Looking more closely at cultural beliefs
- Faithfulness: what does it mean to be faithful
- Extramarital relationships-the causes
- Extramarital relationships-the consequences
- Special session on HIV/AIDS and multiple concurrent sexual partnerships
- How to avoid MCPs?
- Chapter wrap-up
- Homework
- Important verses

**Time:**

3 Hours 25 Minutes

**Materials:**

- Bible/ Qur'an
- Paper and pens

**Preparations for the counselor:**

- Read the whole session beforehand.
- Read the Bible/Quran verses related to the topic and other additional materials.
- Consider other references or quotes that may be useful in the session.

Introducing chapter 5



Time:

20 Minutes



Special note to the counselor:

Do step two, three and four if you are meeting for the first time. But if this is not the first time the group is coming together remind couples that they are supposed to actively participate in all the activities. Also remind them of the rules which you formed together with them.



Chapter overview:

Welcome couples to the group and tell them that they will discuss the topic of sex outside marriage and how this is related to HIV/AIDS. They will look at the causes, the consequences and how they can remain faithful to each other.



Chapter objectives:

- To better understand the causes and dangers of sex outside marriage.
- To help couples understand the risks of being in a sexual network.
- To help couples renew their commitment to remain faithful to each other.



Instructions:

Step one: Remind couples of the previous chapter where we looked at sex in marriage as a gift from God/ Allah.

- Good communication, love and trust ensure couples honor the gift of sex which God gave to them.
- Sometimes, however, marriages go through difficult times where one partner is tempted to go outside the home for sex.

Step two: Tell participants that:

- Couples will actively participate in each activity, not just listen. They will help guide the session by contributing information to discussions and participating in activities.
- Couples will be able to discuss feelings, values, and attitudes, as well as factual information.
- Couples will practice important skills to help strengthen their relationship with their partner.

Step three: Find out from couples:

- What they are expecting to gain from participating in this group.
- List their responses and clarify if you feel they are beyond the scope of the sessions.

Step four: Ask couples:

- What rules should the group have to make sure no one is disrespected?
- Suggest any others that you feel are important and be sure to include confidentiality.

Step five: Conclude the activity using the following discussion points:

- Asking questions is an important part of participation
- There is no right or wrong answer, rather their experience, discussions and commitment to God/Allah will help determine the answers.

Activity 1: Looking more closely at cultural beliefs



Time:

20 minutes



Activity overview:

Couples will begin to look at some of the cultural beliefs or common misunderstandings around sex outside marriage and how this is related to HIV/AIDS. They will discuss whether these beliefs are true or false and identify what support can be given to better address these issues in their relationship.



Objectives:

- To identify various cultural beliefs and common misunderstandings around sex outside marriage.
- To provide statements that support couples to be faithful to each other.



Instructions:

Step one: Tell couples: They will be discussing cultural beliefs, common sayings and myths about sex outside marriage. In looking more closely, we will begin to separate myth from fact.

Step two: Ask participants to mention some of the cultural practices related to sex outside marriage. Allow time for discussions.

Step three: Some of the cultural beliefs people may come up with include the ones below. Read out to the group the ones that were not mentioned:

- A man must have more sexual partners to be considered a man.
- It is considered a norm for a man to be involved in extramarital relationships. There are a lot of common sayings which encourage men to be unfaithful, for example, a man is a baby, a man should be involved in extramarital relationships, men are dogs etc.
- When a woman is caught in adultery it is an issue but when it's a man, it's considered normal.
- Women who have husbands who are unfaithful are encouraged not to leave the husband stating that there is no man who is faithful.
- Women are made to believe that they are the owners of the husband the other women are just there for a moment.
- There are things men and women can do to make them better sexual partners than others e.g. circumcised men, women with pulled labia, and women who put beads around their waist.
- If you are a man, you cannot eat the same food every day. You need to change.

Step four: Wrap-up the discussion on the cultural beliefs, common sayings and myths with the following points:

- Couples should be encouraged to communicate their sexual preferences for maximum satisfaction.
- Men and women should be encouraged to remain faithful to their partner, even if some societal norms seem to encourage them going outside the home. Sex outside marriage is a sin before God/ Allah. In order to protect ourselves from HIV we need to be faithful to one partner and maintain a good relationship with God/ Allah.
- Changing partners can put you at more risk for HIV. Therefore, sexual partners should not be changed like any other food that we eat. The two are different.

Prayer points:

Pray, as a couple, that:

- We will be able to look a fresh at the myths and traditions that we have grown up with that may still have a hold on us. These are the ones that fuel partners to go outside marriage for sex.



Verses for further reading:

Ephesians 5:25-29

Qur'an 17:32

Qur'an 2:27

Activity 2: Faithfulness: What does it mean to be faithful?



Time:

30 Minutes



Materials:

- Paper and pens/pencils



Activity overview:

Couples will begin to look at the deeper meaning of faithfulness for couples. They will also discuss the benefits of being faithful to each other and how this is related to HIV/AIDS.



Objectives:

- To encourage couples to be faithful to their partner.
- To help couples understand the benefits of being faithful to each other.



Instructions:

Step one:

Explain to participants that:

- Faithfulness in marriage is a commandment from God/ Allah and should be respected.
- The word faithfulness has different meanings to different people.

Step two:

Tell participants that we will now look at the word “faithfulness” and what it means.

- Ask participants to say how they understand the word faithfulness.
- After asking the question, wait for people to respond.
- If only one or two people respond, rephrase the question and ask again. For instance, what does it mean to be a faithful friend? Or a faithful mother? Encourage discussion.
- Ask them, what about between couples?

Possible responses include: Being devoted to a person. Being constant – not changing your devotion because of circumstances. Someone who is faithful is reliable and trustworthy.

Step three:

Wrap-up the discussion by providing the following points:

- Faithfulness for couples usually refers to their sexual relationship. To be faithful

means that you choose to only have sexual intercourse with your partner. It means that you choose not to have other lovers, or participate in sexual acts outside of the committed marriage relationship.

- If a person remains sexually faithful to their partner, and neither of them has been exposed to HIV, then they form a “fence of protection” around their home.
- It is very important for us to think about how our actions and culture influence our sexual relationship with our partners and how this relates to our risks of HIV infection. Sometimes there are outside influences that make it difficult for us to remain faithful. But through commitment to each other and love for God/Allah, we can overcome these challenges.

Step four: Divide the participants into four smaller groups. Give each group paper and markers. Assign each group one of the following jobs:

Group 1:

If couples are faithful, what will life be like for them? What are the results of faithfulness for a couple? Draw pictures of faithful couples to explain your answer.

Group 2:

If couples are unfaithful, what will life be like for them? What are the results of unfaithfulness for couples? Draw pictures of unfaithful couples to explain your answer.

Group 3:

Draw pictures of a church/mosque of faithful couples. If couples are faithful in a church/mosque, what are the results for the church/mosque? How will it impact the church/mosque?

Group 4:

Draw pictures of a church/mosque of unfaithful couples. If couples are unfaithful in a church/mosque, what are the results for the church/mosque? How will it impact the church/mosque?

Ask the groups to think of the following as they are drawing their pictures:

- How does infidelity affect the cohesiveness of the community?
- What will be the effect on children and orphans, health workers, effects on attendance at worship services, effects on the economy?
- In which group would you expect more HIV infections? How would this affect your drawings?

Step five: Call the groups back together.

- Have a spokesperson from each group show their picture and explain what they have drawn and why. They may have both positive and negative pictures. The most important thing is for them to display their feelings about faithfulness and its impact.
- Ask for feedback from the other groups if they agree or disagree with the pictures.
- Summarize the points made for each group.

Step six: Wrap-up and summarize the activity with the following points:

- Faithfulness will help protect you and your partner from new STIs and HIV.
- Faithfulness can protect your future offspring from being born with HIV (if the woman is free from HIV while pregnant).
- Faithfulness is in line with your faith tradition. Religious people therefore will approve and support your decision.
- Faithfulness brings peace to your home – there is trust and honesty.
- Faithfulness means there will be no fear of “getting caught” with someone else.
- Faithful couples have fewer arguments and fights about unfaithfulness.
- Faithful people have more time for their family.
- Faithful relationships are healthier (physically and emotionally) and make a stronger more united church/mosque and community.
- Faithful communities have increased productivity the people are cohesive and able to work to produce more goods and services.

Prayer points:

Pray, as a couple, that:

- You will each have the strength to be faithful to each other. This may not always be easy but God/ Allah can change us if we humble ourselves before Him.



Verses for further reading:

Ephesians 5:28-29

Proverbs 5:18-20

Qur'an 4:34

Qur'an 23:4 -10

Qur'an 70:27

Qur'an 16:91,

Qur'an 37:2-3

Activity 3: Extramarital relationships - The causes



Time:

30 Minutes



Activity overview:

Couples will begin to discuss the causes of unfaithfulness between couples. They will also remind each other of the promises and commitments they have ever made in life. Couples will look at what has helped them to keep or not keep their promises and how they can learn from this to help them remain faithful to their partner. Through discussion of life stories, couples will look at how they can avoid being involved in extramarital relationships.



Objectives:

- To help couples know the causes of unfaithfulness.
- To help couples understand that they can remain faithful to each other.



Instructions:

Step one:

Introduce the activity:

- Let participants know we will be looking more closely at unfaithfulness, identifying what some of the causes are.
- In knowing what things may encourage unfaithfulness, couples can work together to try to avoid these situations.

Step two:

Tell participants to remember any promise or commitment which they have made before and managed to keep. Ask a few individuals to share with the group their promises or commitments.

Step three:

Ask participants if they think it is more difficult to keep the promise of faithfulness than these other promises and why?

Step four:

Wrap-up the discussion and highlight the following points:

- Keeping a promise of sexual faithfulness is very difficult for some people because of their sexual desires/urges but they can still learn from other promises that they have kept.
- Our personal success stories can teach us things about how to overcome new challenges (faithfulness).
- From this last exercise, we can see that we all have had some success in keeping our promises.
- However, sometimes people do things that make it harder for them to keep their promise of faithfulness. Maybe it is the people that they socialize with. Maybe it is the alcohol or chat (drugs) that keeps someone from making a wise decision. Maybe they spend a lot of time thinking about someone other

than their partner. Maybe they tell themselves that it is ok if they are unfaithful when they are working far away from home.

- Their own actions and thoughts lead them down a path of unfaithfulness.

Step five: Divide the participants into four groups of four to five people, keeping men and women separate.

The four groups –two of men and two of women should discuss the following:

- **Men:**
 - What do they think are some of the reasons husbands may cheat on their wives?
 - Think of four things that people in your community/church/mosque do, or think about that make men more vulnerable to being unfaithful.
 - **Women:**
 - What do they think are some of the reasons women may cheat on their husbands?
 - Think of four things that people in your community/church/mosque do, or think about that make women more vulnerable to being unfaithful.
- Write or draw pictures of your answers.

Step six: When everyone is ready:

- Ask all of the groups to share with the rest of the group their responses.
- Ask them to observe if the reasons men and women give are the same or different.
- Ask the group to consider why the reasons men and women cheat are similar or sometimes differ.

Step seven: Summarize the activity by providing the points below. Extra marital sex may occur for many reasons including:

- **Deep rooted marriage problems:** If the marriage itself is damaged or the relations between the two people are neglected and strained, then it can result in people having extra marital affairs.
- **In search of love:** Others involve themselves in extramarital relationships because they no longer feel loved by their spouses or in love. Love like other emotions changes with time. When love dies between two people, they usually end up seeking love somewhere. But often people have forgotten how to express their love and it can still be found in the home if they work at revitalizing it.
- **Lack of sexual satisfaction:** Sex is perhaps one of the most frequent reasons why troubles start in relationships and why one partner seeks it elsewhere. Sex is an amalgamation of love and passion between two people. Couples need to communicate about and evolve their sex life so it does not become monotonous and desire and passion are not lost.

- **Unrealistic expectations:** Many individuals get married with unrealistic expectations of their partners. They think it will be like when they were dating or that the person will change. If they become frustrated with their partner because of unrealistic expectations, they may seek partners outside the home.
- **Marriage takes hard work for it to successfully thrive.** Some people may choose to stop working on the marriage, thinking it is easier to just find someone new. Love also changes over time as does the relationship; if one of the individuals in a marital relationship is not mature enough to handle the changes in the relationship then he or she may opt for an extramarital affair.
- **Loneliness and neglect:** People may feel their spouse no longer loves them or stops treating them special and they seek to find this feeling elsewhere.
- **Beliefs about gender roles and sex:** Some people believe a man cannot control his sex drive and must have many partners in order to be happy; women may feel they have to be passive during sex and be reluctant to talk about sex or try new things.

Prayer points:

Pray, as a couple, that:

- You will not take going out of the family as a solution to your marital problems rather you will have the courage to solve your problems amicably and come to an agreement
- You will have and keep a genuine love between you and your partner by communicating, solving problems together, and remaining faithful to each other.



Verses for further reading:

Qur'an 49:12

Qur'an 2:27

Qur'an 17:32

Qur'an 22:1-6

1 Corinthians 7:3-5

Ephesians 5:22-33

Activity 4: Extramarital relationships - The consequences



Time:

30 Minutes



Activity overview:

Couples will brainstorm and discuss the consequences of extra marital relationships, which include bringing HIV in the home.



Objectives:

- To help couples understand that unfaithfulness can have negative consequences and should be avoided.



Instructions:

Step one: Remind participants of the previous sessions where we talked about the meaning of faithfulness and the causes of unfaithfulness. Explain that, as a group, we will continue to explore the issue of unfaithfulness by identifying what are the possible consequences of going outside of the marriage.

Step two: Ask participants to brainstorm the following questions, allowing for discussion:

- What consequences can extra-marital affairs have in the home?
- Do they know of any examples of homes that have been affected by extramarital relationships? Tell them that you don't need to know the names of the people.
- Ask participants to discuss.

Step three: Wrap-up the activity and summarize the following key points:

- An extramarital affair affects families in a multitude of ways. One of the most devastating effects is the sense of betrayal that the spouse feels upon learning of the affair. It is very hard to get back trust after learning of an affair.
- If one person chooses to have sex outside of the home, they can bring HIV back home and infect their partner. Studies have shown that the highest risk of becoming infected with HIV is among married couples because of widespread prevalence of extramarital affairs. By remaining sexually faithful to your partner you greatly reduce the chance of spreading the virus to others, in your family and community.
- Extramarital affairs cause problems not only in the husband and wife's relationship but with daily home life. Even if the betrayed spouse does not

know of the affair, its effects are still severe. The cheating spouse is gone more frequently, comes home later and his or her attention is not totally focused on the family when he or she is at home. Financial issues may arise if the unfaithful spouse is spending money on gifts for his mistress or providing for her bills. The effects of extramarital affairs are like tentacles that reach into nearly every aspect of the family's life

- Extramarital affairs can also cause serious effects on children. Some children may be deeply traumatized after seeing the pain of their parents. Other children can also be affected by the increasing absence of one parent. Others may repeat the pattern in their own relationships and have extra marital affairs, as this behavior has been modeled by their parents.
- Couples can rebuild their marriage if the trust has been broken but it is hard work and takes time. Many extra marital affairs end up in divorce, which affects the entire family – especially the children. They may feel protective of the betrayed parent and break off relations with the other parent.
- Engaging in extra marital affairs means you are breaking your covenant with God/Allah.

Prayer points:

Pray, as a couple, that:

- If your home is broken that God/ Allah will bring you back together. Pray for your children who also suffer when there is no peace between parents.
- You will have the strength to remain faithful to your partner in order to protect them.
- Those who are suffering because of the unfaithfulness of their partner will be able to heal.



Verses for further reading:

Qur'an 17:32

Qur'an 24:2-3

Qur'an 5:5

Proverbs 6:26-29, 32-34

Activity 5: Special session on HIV/AIDS and Multiple Concurrent Sexual Partnership



Time:

30 Minutes



Materials:

- A4 paper
- Markers
- Papers
- Thread



Special preparations for the counselor:

- Read additional notes on Multiple Concurrent Partnerships (MCP) in the annex before the session.
- Clearly understand the relationship between HIV/AIDS and having multiple sexual partners.



Activity overview:

Couples will look at the consequences of extra marital affairs, particularly the risks of engaging with more than one sexual partner and being part of a sexual network. The scenario included in the activity will help couples have a clear understanding of how HIV is spread faster in a sexual network.



Objectives:

- To help couples understand the relationship between HIV/AIDS and having multiple sexual partners.
- To help couples appreciate the dangers of being involved in a sexual networks.



Instructions:

Step one: Introduce the activity:

- Let participants know that we will be looking at the risks involved with having more than one sexual partner at one time.
- Explain Multiple Concurrent Partners (MCP) (refer to annex).
- Remind couples that knowing each other's status and being mutually faithful to each other are the only way to avoid bringing HIV into the home.

Step two: Tell Participants that they will explore the risks around having multiple concurrent partners through a guided dramatization of how sexual networks work.

- Ask for 10 volunteers from the group (5 women and 5 men, if possible).
- Explain that these volunteers will all participate in a simple demonstration about relationships.
- The following dialogue is a guide. You can change the names to make them more familiar. You can even have members of the group help you construct the relationships that may exist, giving everyone names, the number of partners, and the reasons why they are in multiple concurrent relationships. It is important that as you add more relationships, that the additional volunteers stand near the original person.
- If you like, you can have volunteers hold on to part of a ball of string as you go along to show how they are connected to each other. The string can go back and forth as you talk about the new relationships between the individuals (i.e. Mussa holds string first to Maria, than it goes back to Mussa to Joyce than, back to Mussa , then back to Sara....)

Step three: Using the scenario at the end of the activity as a guide, have the volunteers stand up together to demonstrate the relationships between them.

Step four: In a hat or box, have folded pieces of paper with the positive or negative sign.

- Have 10 pieces of paper for 10 volunteers.
- Two pieces should be with + signs and 8 with – signs. (Out of 10 volunteers, 2 will be positive, 8 will be negative.)
- The papers are all mixed up
- Ask each of the volunteers to take one, but instruct them not to open them until indicated.

Step five: After all the volunteers have picked, ask them to open their pieces of paper. Ask the volunteers to raise their hands

- Which ones have a positive sign?
- Which ones have a negative sign?

Step six: Discuss the implications with the group by asking the following questions:

- Ask, how does one person's HIV status in this network, affect everyone else?
- Show the group that if only one person is HIV+ in the network, everyone who is sleeping with someone in the “network” becomes at risk and that the more frequent the sex is, the higher the risk.

Step seven: Wrap-up the activity by sharing the following points:

- Many of us do not know the extent of sexual networks we may be involved in, particularly if we have more than one sexual partner.
- Married couples are now the group with the highest risk of HIV infection because of the widespread prevalence of extramarital affairs.
- Having multiple partners and being part of a sexual network puts you and your loved ones at risk for HIV and this has devastating consequences for your family. Choose to stick to your partner, and reduce the risk of getting infected with HIV and passing it to your loved one.

- If you are having problems in your marriage and are tempted to have an affair, seek counseling to resolve your problems. Do not look for solutions through sex outside the home.
- Deaths of parents caused by HIV/AIDS contribute to the increased number of orphans in the world.
- If you have had an affair outside the home, you may have been exposed to HIV and infected your spouse. The only way to know for sure is to get an HIV test; couples should go for testing together.
- MCP is also dangerous to those who are already HIV positive in that they risk re-infection of a new strand of HIV and are also at increased risk for other STIs.

Prayer points:

Pray, as a couple, that:

- If you are involved with more than one sexual partner, that God/ Allah will give you the strength to come out of the web.
- Those whose hearts are broken after learning that their partner was cheating on them are able to heal and forgive.
- Those who are having relationships outside of their marriage will find the power to reject temptation and recommit to their spouse.



Verses for further reading:

Mark 11:25-26

Proverbs 5:15, 18-20

Qur'an 25:68

Qur'an 16:90

Qur'an 4:29

Qur'an 23:1-6

Qur'an 24:30-31

Guiding story for activity six:

Multiple concurrent partnerships scenario

- Maria and Mussa are married (male and female member stand in the centre).
- Mussa loves his wife very much, but has been seeing Mary for at least two years (Mary stands near Mussa).
- Very frequently, he sees Sara, who works at a bottle store in the town where he goes on business (Sara stands nearby as well).
- Mary, while she loves Mussa very much, does not feel very secure or satisfied in the relationship. She has John in her life as well, who she sees every once in a while. He helps her out with some of her money problems, and is always a lot of fun to be with. (John stands nearer to Mary).
- Sara has a boyfriend, Mavuto, who helps take care of her. But, he is unreliable and so she sometimes sleeps with other men to make her feel wanted, or for some gifts, and a bit of cash.
- Mateyu is one of her regular “casual friends” who always seeks out her company when he travels to her boma (where she works). (Mavuto and Mateyu stand near Sara).
- Mavuto also has a wife named Elube who he lives with. (Elube stands near Mavuto).
- Mateyu has a wife named Naphiri and a long term relationship with Monica. (Naphiri and Monica stand up near Mateyu). And it could go on....

Activity 7: How to avoid multiple sexual partners



Time:

30 Minutes



Activity overview:

Couples will discuss how they can avoid involving themselves in having multiple sexual partners by being reminded of what was discussed in the previous chapters on open communication and sexual satisfaction in a marriage.



Objectives:

- To encourage couples to remain faithful to each other.
- To identify ways couples can resist temptation.



Instructions:

Step one: Introduce the activity: Letting participants know we will be reviewing some of the previous chapters and activities.

Step two: Read chapter 4, activities 4 and 5; chapter 5, activity 3.

- Remind participants of the following points which were discussed in chapter 4, activities 4 and 5; chapter 5, activity 3.
- Communicating about sexual needs is very important. Several surveys have identified that effectiveness in conveying one's preferences and feelings about sex is the key to a good sex life.
- Couples should talk about their sexual needs if they are to enjoy their sexual life. If you don't communicate, your partner will not know what pleases you and if you are satisfied.
- Lack of communication about sex is one of the main reasons men and women seek partners outside the marriage, which can bring HIV into the home.
- Sex is most enjoyable when there is love and trust in the relationship.
- Make use of different styles and approaches and do not be afraid to try out new things or feel it is "wrong." Most married people complain of monotony of sexual style, which in some cases leads to loss of the initial excitement and interest. Couples should be encouraged to make use of many styles when having sex.
- Husbands and wives should take time to prepare each other until they are all ready for sex. They should all know that men and women can get aroused at different times and with different stimulation. Many times a woman may take longer than a man to be aroused. Let them be sensitive to each other's needs. Men should learn to hold themselves and wait until their wife is ready for entry. This will help both of them to enjoy the act.

Step three: Ask participants to think of how the points below can help couples to avoid having multiple sexual partners.

- Open and honest communication.
- Sexual satisfaction and communication in the bedroom.
- Commitment to each other and to God/Allah.

Step four: Ask participants if they have additional points on what couples should do to avoid having multiple sexual partners in order to reduce the risk of HIV and other STIs.

Prayer points:

Pray, as a couple, that:

- You will be able to remain faithful to your partner. Only God/Allah can help us overcome temptations to cheat on our spouses.
- God/ Allah will be able to help you to openly discuss sex with your partner so that you both limit your desires to seek sexual satisfaction outside of your marriage.



Verses for further reading:

Qur'an 23:1-6

Qur'an 24:30-31

Qur'an 17:34

Proverbs 5:18-19

Ephesians 5:26-29

The prophet peace be upon him said: If anyone among you sees with lust to a strange woman, he should rush to his own spouse for relief (sexual intercourse) at his home; In such doing it helps you to control sinful behavior following your lust of indulging in adultery.



Chapter summary and wrap-up

**Time:**

20 Minutes

**Instructions:**

Step one: Remind couples that it is possible to remain faithful to each other and couples should try hard to avoid situations that make them vulnerable and create temptation.

Step two: Tell participants that we have looked at some important points about sex outside marriage. These include:

- There are different causes of extramarital affairs among which are deeply rooted marriage problems, searching for love, lack of sexual satisfaction, loneliness and negligence.
- The consequences of extramarital affairs are like tentacles that reach into nearly every aspect of the family's life. It affects the partners, the children and the family at large.
- In Malawi the HIV epidemic is largely being spread through MCP. Having multiple partners and being part of a sexual network puts you and your loved ones at risk for HIV and this has devastating consequences for your family. Stick to one partner, and reduce the risk of getting infected with HIV and passing it to your loved one.

Homework:

Tell participants to continue discussing the topic at home. Encourage couples to:

- Discuss how they can remain faithful to each other.

**Verses for further reading:**

Psalms 128:1-3
Leviticus 15:19;
1 Corinthians 7:3-5,
Exodus 20:14
Qur'an 30:21,
Qur'an 23: 4-6,
Qur'an 24:1-6,



Chapter 6



Living with discordance in marriage & PMTCT

Discordance is an issue that is often misunderstood and causes a lot of problems between couples. In this session we will look at how discordant couples (in which one is HIV-positive and the other HIV-negative) can deal positively with HIV in their relationship and what they need to consider when making a decision about whether or not to have children.

Participatory activities and scenarios have been included in the session that will help couples look at their beliefs around discordance, explore the importance of couple testing and counseling, clarify issues around how discordance comes about and understand how HIV positive mothers can prevent transmitting the virus to their children.

Chapter overview

Audience:

This chapter is for those who are married.

Activities:

- Title
- Chapter overview
- Introducing chapter 6
- Looking more closely at cultural beliefs
- Plenary: HIV transmission
- Discordant couples
- Couple testing
- Dealing with testing results
- Prevention of Mother-to-Child Transmission
- Living positively with HIV
- Chapter wrap-up
- Homework
- Important verses



Time:

3 Hours 20 Minutes



Materials:

- Bible/ Qur'an
- Paper and pens



Preparations for the counselor:

- Read the whole session before hand.
- Read the Bible/Quran verses related to the topic and other additional materials.
- Consider other references or quotes that may be useful in the session.

Introducing chapter 6



Time:

20 Minutes



Special note to the counselor:

Do step two, three and four if you are meeting for the first time. But if this is not the first time the group is coming together remind couples that they are supposed to actively participate in all the activities. Also remind them of the rules which you formed together with them.



Chapter overview:

Welcome couples to the group and point out that they will discuss the topic of Discordance, Couple Testing and Prevention of Mother To Child Transmission (PMTCT). Couples will discuss how discordance comes about, the importance of couple testing and how HIV positive mothers can prevent transmitting the virus to their children.



Chapter objectives:

- To better understand discordancy.
- To help couples appreciate the importance of supporting each other in a discordant relationship
- To encourage couple testing for HIV
- To understand more about mother to child transmission of HIV and learn how couples can support each other in Prevention of Mother to Child Transmission (PMTCT).



Instructions:

Step one: Share with couples the following points:

- Discordancy: Couple discordance is a situation where one person is HIV positive and the other is HIV negative. Just because one person in the marriage is HIV positive does not mean they have gone outside of the marriage. This is why it is important to test before getting married.
- Mother to Child Transmission: A mother can transmit HIV to her baby if she is HIV positive. Mother-to-child transmission of HIV is the second most common mode of transmission in Malawi.
- Couples who are both HIV positive or discordant can make informed choices to have or not have children.
- People who are infected with HIV can have loving healthy marriages and live long productive lives.

Step two: Tell participants that:

- Couples will actively participate in each activity, not just listen. They will help guide the session by contributing information to discussions and participating in activities.

- Couples will be able to discuss feelings, values, and attitudes, as well as factual information.
- Couples will practice important skills to help strengthen their relationship with their partner.

Step three: Find out from the couples:

- What they are expecting to gain from participating in this group.
- List their responses and clarify if you feel they are beyond the scope of the sessions.

Step four: Ask couples:

- What rules should the group have to make sure no one is disrespected?
- Suggest any others that you feel are important and be sure to include confidentiality.

Step five: Conclude the activity using the following discussions points:

- Asking questions is an important part of participation.
- There is no right or wrong answer, rather their experience, discussions and commitment to God/Allah will help determine the answers.

Activity 1: Looking more closely at cultural beliefs



Time:

20 minutes



Activity overview:

Couples will begin to look at some of the cultural beliefs or common misunderstandings around discordance, couple testing and mother to child transmission. They will discuss whether these beliefs are true or false and identify what support can be given to better address these issues in their relationship.



Objectives:

- To identify various cultural beliefs and common misunderstandings around discordance, couple testing and prevention of mother to child transmission.
- To provide true statements that support couples to better understand discordance, couple counseling and PMTCT.



Instructions:

Step one: Tell couples that they will be discussing cultural beliefs and common myths about discordance, couple testing and PMTCT. In looking more closely, we will begin to separate myth from fact.

Step two: Ask participants to mention some of the cultural beliefs, common sayings and myths related to discordance, couple testing and mother to child transmission. Allow time for discussions.

Step three: Some of the cultural beliefs people may come up with include the ones below. Read out to the group the ones that were not mentioned:

- The one who is HIV negative is considered to be a carrier who does not get sick but infects others.
- Those that have blood group ‘o’ are carriers
- The one who is HIV positive was unfaithful.
- If the wife is the one who is HIV positive the marriage should end while if it is a man the marriage can continue.
- Discordant couples should never have children.
- It is not possible for one person to be negative and the other positive when they have been having unprotected sex.

Step four: Wrap-up the discussion on cultural beliefs, common sayings and myths with the following points:

- HIV infection can come from either partner, therefore marriage should continue and they have to be compassionate and support each other.
- Unless both people were tested before getting married, it is not possible to say whether someone has been unfaithful in the marriage. One person can come into the marriage HIV positive and not know they are infected.
- HIV positive or discordant couples can have children who are HIV negative but they must seek counseling from the health facility in order to know the best steps in preventing HIV transmission.
- It is possible for one partner to be HIV negative even though they have been having unprotected sex.

Prayer points:

Pray, as a couple, that:

- You will be able to change the cultural beliefs and address the myths which facilitate the spread of HIV for positive change.
- God will help couples give up the cultural beliefs, myths and common saying they have been holding to which are contrary to the word of God.



Verses for further reading:

Mathew 9:35-36

1 John 1:9

Qur'an 66:6

Qur'an 30:21



Activity 2: HIV and AIDS



Time:

20 minutes



Special preparations for the counselor:

- Be sure to read the annex on HIV/AIDS before beginning this activity.



Activity overview:

Couples will be reminded of the basics of HIV and AIDS. They will be given a chance to ask for clarification on other HIV/AIDS related issues they don't understand.



Objectives

- To equip participants with knowledge on HIV and AIDS.
- To help couples better understand some HIV/AIDS related issues.



Instruction:

Step one: Introduce the activity:

- Let participants know that we will be looking more closely at the topic of HIV/AIDS.
- HIV and AIDS can have a strong impact on a relationship, marriage, and family.
- It is important to know as much as possible and take the necessary steps to protect ourselves and our families.

Step two: Remind people about the basics of HIV transmission by sharing with them the following (If you need additional information, please refer to the annex):

- HIV stands for Human immunodeficiency virus (HIV). This virus is what causes someone to get AIDS.
- HIV in Malawi is primarily spread through unprotected sex with someone who is already infected. Unprotected means that the couple did not use a condom.
- HIV can also be spread through the exchange of body fluids like blood, vaginal fluids, sperms, milk etc.
- HIV can also spread from a mother to her baby during pregnancy, childbirth, or breast milk after the baby is born.
- HIV weakens the body's immune system. The immune system is what helps the body fight disease. When the body's immune system becomes so weak that it cannot fight disease, the person is said to have AIDS.
- There is no cure for AIDS but there are medications called ARVs (anti retroviral) that can help a person who is HIV positive live a long, productive, happy life.



- People who are HIV positive can also have a loving, wonderful, beautiful and strong marriage.
- The only way to know for sure if you have been infected with HIV is to get an HIV test.

Step three: Ask the group if they have any additional questions. Respond to the ones you feel comfortable answering.

- If you are not clear on the answer or do not feel comfortable to answer them at the time, write them down and tell participants you will have an answer the next time you meet.

Prayer points:

Pray, as a couple, that:

- Those that are affected and infected with HIV that God/ Allah will intervene and give them the strength to make the necessary decisions to help them live a long and healthy life.
- Those working with the medical services in our communities will show professionalism, compassion, wisdom and fairness in meeting the needs of those who need their help. Pray in particular for christians/muslims working in the medical services, and for sufficient resources.
- True love will flourish among christians/muslims because true love drives away fear even the fear created by having HIV in the family.



Verses for further reading:

Ezekiel 37:1-14

1 John 3:16

Ephesians 5:26-29

Qur'an 39:9

Qur'an 16:43

Activity 3: Discordant couples



Time:

30 Minutes



Special preparations for the counselor:

- This topic is more medical. You may want to invite or refer couples to a trained medical personnel to respond to some of the questions couples might have.
- There is additional information in the annex on discordance that can help you respond to some of the questions participants may have.



Activity overview:

Couples will begin to look at one of the most crucial issues about HIV and AIDS-discordance. They will discuss how this is caused and challenges discordant couples face. They will also learn how discordant couples can support each other.



Objectives:

- To help participants understand discordance.
- To give hope to discordant couples and help them better know how to cope with the situation.



Instructions:

Step one: Introduce this activity:

- Let participants know we will be discussing discordancy.
- Remind participants that discordance is a situation where one spouse is HIV positive while the other partner is HIV negative.
- Many people find it difficult to understand how someone can have sex with a person who is HIV positive and not get infected with HIV.
- This usually happens when the infected person has very little HIV in their body (low viral load). People have a low viral load when “antibodies” – the defense force of the immune system –have destroyed most of the virus or when they are taking ARVs. The drugs prevent the virus from producing more copies.

Step two: Explain to the participants:

- There are three ways a couple can come to be discordant:
- One partner may have gotten infected before they were married – perhaps they were previously married or engaged in sexual relations. If they did not have an HIV test, they may not have realized they were infected.
- One partner may have been born HIV positive but were never told their status.

- One partner may have engaged in sex outside the home and become infected.

Step three: Ask participants to think of:

- Couples they know who are discordant (tell them you do not want to know who they are and it is best to keep the names confidential).
- What kind of challenges do they face as a couple?
- If they don't know any discordant couples, ask them to think of some of the challenges they might face.

Step four: Share the following points with the group:

Discordant couples can face challenges such as:

- Lack of trust between the two. The negative partner may think that his or her partner has been cheating on him/her.
- The challenge of disclosing their status to others and relatives as this may lead to stigma.
- Ridicule from friends, relatives or partner upon disclosing their status.
- The negative partner may refuse his or her partner sex for fear of being infected and if they have sex they may not enjoy it.
- They may battle with the idea of having children.
- Having to care for the infected person if they get sick.

Remind participants the only way to know if someone is HIV positive is to get an HIV test.

Prayer points:

Pray, as a couple, that:

- God will give discordant couples the courage to accept their situation and follow what they have been advised for positive living.
- God will help the negative partner to forgive the other partner if the problem came because s/he was cheating.
- As a church/ mosque we need to pray with people and also encourage those of us living with HIV to obtain and continue with ART.
- Those who suffer from self-stigma and feel they are shunned by society are able to find the support they need.
- You be forgiven for the words, actions and inactions that could have harmed or stigmatized others and find the strength to fight against stigma in your community or church/ mosque.



Verses for further reading:

1 Thessalonians 5:15

Mathew 5:23

Qur'an 2:195

Qur'an 4:35, 135

Activity 4: Couples testing



Time:

30 Minutes



Activity overview:

Couples will begin to discuss the importance of couple testing and how they can encourage others to go for testing. The activity will help couples to go for testing together and discuss the positive way of reacting to the test results.



Objectives:

- To encourage couples to go for testing together.
- To help couples understand the importance of going for testing together.



Instructions:

Step one: Introducing the activity:

- Couples testing is when a couple tests, receives their results, and make future plans together.

Step two: Read out the story at the end of the activity to the participants.

Step three: After reading the story, discuss in plenary the following questions with the participants:

- What lessons can be drawn from this story?
- Why is it important for couples to go for counseling together?
- How would you react if your partner asked you to go for testing together? Be honest.
- How would you react if your spouse is found positive?
- How would you encourage other couples to go for testing?

Step four: Remind couples of the following important points:

- Couples should test together so they can discuss the results and make plans together for their lives.
- Test results also can help people make choices about contraception or pregnancy.
- Couples can support each other to live productive healthy lives if one or both of them tests positive

Prayer points:

Pray, as a couple, that:

- Pray for those working with the medical services in our communities to show professionalism, compassion, wisdom and fairness in meeting the needs of those who need their help. Pray also for them to have sufficient resources.
- God will give you the courage to go and access HTC services with your partner and to be able to accept your and your partner's results.



Verses for further reading:

Mathew 19:5-6

Qur'an 39:9

Scenario for activity five:

A certain man got sick and died after a long illness. The wife was very concerned with the death of the husband. After burial, the husband's workplace asked her to go and pick up the things the husband left in his office. As she was picking up the things, she came across a white bottle, which had some tablets inside. She took the bottle with her and asked her friend, who was a nurse, what the medicine was for. She was shocked when the nurse told her that they were ARV tablets. She then realized that her husband died of AIDS. She went for testing and was found to be positive.

Activity 5: Dealing with testing results



Time:

30 Minutes



Special note to the counselor:

- This topic is more medical. You may want to invite or refer couples to a trained medical personnel who is conversant with issues of discordance to help clarify issues couples will have problems to understand.
- You should read the annex on discordance.
- Print handouts for the discussion scenarios.



Activity overview:

Couples will discuss different discordant related scenarios and begin to discuss issues related to discordance. In small groups they will begin to understand that discordance can happen differently from one couple to another.



Objectives:

- To deepen the couples understanding of discordance.
- To give hope to discordant couples and help them cope with the situation.



Instructions:

Step one: Introduce the activity:

- Remind participants of the previous session where we started to look at discordancy.
- Before continuing, make sure the couples understand the topic of discordancy and find out if they have any other questions.

Step two: Divide the participants into buzz groups of up to 3 people.

Step three: Hand out the scenarios to each group (one scenario per group). Ask the participants to discuss the cause of discordance in the scenarios that they will be given.

Step four: Ask the groups to report back on what they discussed.

Step five: Provide the group with the following additional information

The story of Jane and Richard

- It is possible that Jane got the virus before marrying Richard and they both did not have a test before getting married.
- The time they were getting married, the viral load for Jane was low as such the chances of passing the virus to the husband was also low as such she did not infect her husband

The story of Mary and Yusuf

- It is possible that the time they were going for HTC, Mary was in window period as such the virus was not dictated.
- Both Muslims and Christians Agree that condoms can be used by discordant couples. As such Mary and Yusuf should start using condoms because there is still a chance that Mary too can get infected.

The story of Magret and Phillip

- The time Phillip was getting married to Margret he was already on treatment but he did not tell his wife. ARVs help to boost immunity in the body and lower the viral load. This reduced the chances of passing the virus to his wife.
- Both Muslims and Christians Agree that condoms can be used by discordant couples. As such Phillip and Magret should start using condoms because there is still a chance that Magret too can get infected.
- Open communication should be encouraged between couples; they should not hide their status from each other.

The story of Sophie and Martin

- It is possible that Sophie had a low viral load in her body because her immunity was strong when she was getting married to Martin. The chances of passing the virus to him was very low.
- Sophie and Martini need to be advised that discordance is not a reason for divorce.
- Sophie and Martin are supposed to follow the new PMTCT protocol.
- As a facilitator explain to the participants the information about PMTCT.
- Sophia and martin should use condoms every time they are having sex.

Step Six: Wrap-up and summarize the exercise by highlighting the following points:

- It is possible for one person to be HIV + and for that person's partner to be negative even if they have been together for a long time.
- If you are HIV positive, then whenever you have unprotected sex you are placing your sexual partner at risk of getting infected. You are also at risk of getting a different strain of the virus your body has to then fight off.
- It is very important that both partners in a relationship know their HIV status to protect themselves, and each other, from HIV, particularly if they are discordant.
- Discordance is a reality in married life. There is need for mutual support between both partners to ensure continued marital harmony.
- Discordant couples should use a condom every time they have sex in order to protect the HIV negative individual.
- As a discordant couple, take advantage of your status to reach out to other couples who may be facing similar challenges.

Prayer points:

Pray, as a couple, that:

- God/Allah will help us to forgive just as he forgives us whenever we have done wrong. With God/ Allah, nothing is impossible.
- God would help us to love unconditionally even those that are infected with HIV.
- Pray for love between couples who have tested positive so that they should love and care for each other.



Verses for further reading:

Qur'an 5:2

Qur'an 2:227-229

Matthew 6:14-15

Matthew 18:21-35

Ephesians 5:26-29



Scenario for activity six:

Scenario 1: No testing prior to marriage; one of them later tests positive

Jane and Richard got married without testing for HIV. After sometime in marriage, Jane was found to be HIV positive while Richard was found negative. How could this difference in status come about? How would you react if you were in this situation?

Scenario 2: Tested before marriage yet one of them turns positive

Mary and Yusuf tested negative during their premarital testing. Both of them were faithful to one another. After some time, one of them tests positive. Please explain how this could have happened? How would you react if you were in this situation?

Scenario 3: Man has been born with virus yet does not infect wife

Margaret and Philip got married last year. Philip did not reveal to Margaret that he had been born with the HIV virus. After sometime in marriage, Margaret falls pregnant and is encouraged to go for an HIV test with Phillip. Unwillingly, Phillip goes for testing and is found to be positive while Margaret tests negative. How could this have happened and how would you react if you were in this position?"

Scenario 4: Positive results invoke angry reaction from man

Sophie and Martin got married without testing for HIV. After sometime in marriage, Sophie falls ill and is eventually found positive. Martin himself tests negative. Unfortunately, he reacts angrily to the results and decides to break the marriage for fear of being infected. How could this have happened? How do you help this couple?

Activity 6: Prevention of Mother To Child Transmission



Time:

30 Minutes



Special preparations for the counselor:

- Read annex on Prevention of Mother to Child Transmission (PMTCT).



Activity overview:

Couples will begin to look at how HIV positive parents can have a healthy baby who is HIV negative. Couples will also discuss how men can support their wives with PMTCT.



Objectives:

- To equip couples with knowledge about issues of PMTCT and help encourage them to access PMTCT services.
- To help men understand the importance of and accept to support their wives with PMTCT.



Instructions:

Step one: Introduce the session: Tell participants that we will be talking about HIV and prevention of mother to child transmission.

Step two: Remind participants that:

- Mother-to-child transmission of HIV is the second most common mode of HIV transmission in Malawi.
- A mother can pass HIV to her baby during pregnancy, labour, delivery, and breastfeeding.
- Without any intervention, 27 – 30 percent of the babies born to HIV infected mothers will acquire the virus. Of these HIV infected babies, the majority (65%) are infected during labor and delivery, which can be reduced by appropriate preventive interventions.
- If prevention methods are followed, a mother can protect her baby from HIV in most cases.
- There are new PMTCT guidelines and it is important to seek counseling if you or your wife are pregnant.

Step three: Tell participants that we will now do an exercise to help us clarify issues around PMTCT.

- Tell participants that you will read out statements about PMTCT. Ask them to stand up if they agree or to remain seated if they disagree with the statements.
- For each statement, ask the group:

- Why do you think it is true (if standing)?
- Why do you disagree (if sitting)?

Step four: Clarify all misconceptions by providing the information in the annex. You can also include the points below:

- A couple who is discordant or where both partners are HIV positive can have a healthy baby who is HIV negative. The best way to have an HIV negative baby is to:
- Know your HIV status before getting pregnant
- If you choose to get pregnant, make sure you are in good health and stay in good health
- Go for ANC visits and discuss PMTCT with a health provider; follow all the instructions they provide
- WHO has introduced new guidelines for prevention of mother to child transmission. Pregnant women who are HIV positive are now placed on treatment for life, regardless of their CD4 count.
- With the new PMTCT guidelines, mothers are advised to breastfeed their children for 24 months and not only for six months as the previous guidance given to HIV+ mothers.
- Every couple should seek a doctor's advice regarding the decision to have a child – the possible risks, and ways to minimize them to the mother, unborn child and the unaffected partner.
- It is also important to avoid Mother-To-Child Transmission of HIV by preventing women of reproductive age from becoming HIV infected. Both christians and muslims believe that abstinence for the unmarried is the best preventive way. For those in marriage, mutual faithfulness is recommended.
- For those who are already infected with HIV, refer them to a health care provider for counseling
- However, for those women who are pregnant and are already HIV infected, there is adequate evidence that use of antiretroviral drugs and following the advice of the health provider can significantly reduce transmission of HIV from the mother to her child.
- Men should support their wives to adhere to the new PMTCT protocol.

Prayer points:

Pray, as a couple, that:

- For HIV positive couples and for those who are discordant but want to have children that God/Allah will help them accept the challenges.
- Couples adhere to treatment and other advice given to them and be able to have a negative baby if they decide to have children.
- Judgmental attitudes in the church/ mosque will change, so that people living with HIV can find love and support and share their gifts within the church.



Verses for further reading:

Hebrews 13:4

Ephesians 5:26-29

Qur'an 66:6

Scenario for activity seven:

- Every woman who is HIV+ will have an HIV+ baby. (false)
- There are many steps that we can take to prevent passing HIV to our children. (true)
- HIV can only be passed to the baby during pregnancy. (false)
- Using condoms consistently is very important to do during pregnancy, and while breastfeeding. (true)
- You need to have supportive people to ensure that a baby is fed safely. (true)
- You cannot breastfeed your baby if you are HIV +. (false)
- A mother's health is put under a lot of stress if she is pregnant and has HIV. (true)
- All HIV+ mothers should deliver at a health facility. (true)
- Prevention of mother to child transmission is the responsibility of the mother only, the man is not involved. (false)

Activity 7: Living positively with HIV



Time:

30 Minutes



Activity overview:

Couples will discuss how an a HIV positive person can live positively with HIV. They will look at the things an HIV positive person is supposed to avoid and those things s/he is supposed to do.



Objectives:

- To help those who are HIV positive, live positively with the virus



Instructions:

Step one: Tell participants

- When you learn that you have HIV, you feel many emotions: fear, grief, depression, denial, anger and anxiety.
- Being found HIV positive does not mean the end of life, there is still hope. Even though there is no cure for AIDS, there are many ways to live positively with the sickness.
- A person can be HIV positive but still live a healthy, satisfied life and have a happy married life.

Step two: Ask the group to discuss in plenary

- What are some of the things that an HIV positive person should refrain from?
- How can one live positively with HIV? What are the things s/he is supposed to do? Allow time for discussion.

Step three: Wrap up the discussion by highlighting the following points;

- **Talk to someone about your problems.**
 - It is easier to cope with the sickness when you know you are loved and accepted as you are. Therefore it is important that you talk to someone who can give you support. You can talk to a friend, member of your family, a counselor, a doctor/ health worker, a pastor/sheikh or faith healer.
 - Supportive relationships with those who accept and understand the situation are important – many people living with HIV say they find a new sense of meaning and purpose in life. It also encourages good health.
- **Eat well**
 - You need to learn how to take care of yourself, and to eat well to help your body protect itself against the attack from the virus. Food will not cure HIV, but it can help to keep your immune system strong

- Eat lots of fresh food like fruit and vegetables every day. These foods help your body fight sickness.
 - Eat lots of beans, lentils, soya mince and tinned fish if you cannot afford to buy meat or chicken. These foods build the body and help keep you strong.
 - Eat lots of brown rice, brown bread, potatoes, cassava. These foods give you energy.
 - You should also add some butter, oil, milk, peanut butter and nuts to your food. This will give you energy and help you stay the same weight.
 - Drink 6 to 8 glasses of water everyday
 - You should stop smoking and drinking, and avoid caffeine, junk foods, and drugs as these weaken your body.
- **Do exercises regularly**
 - Exercise at least four times a week, for thirty minutes preferably with other people. A cheap, easy way to exercise is to go for a walk.
 - Music, art and dance can help touch the emotions directly when talking about feelings is difficult.
 - **Take anti-retroviral treatment**
 - There is no cure for AIDS, however, there is treatment- Anti-retroviral treatment (ART) makes the HIV in your body fall asleep. This gives your body a chance to grow strong again and when this happens, your body will be able to fight diseases.
 - Speak to your health worker about when you should begin your treatment program.
 - When you take ART, you are still HIV positive and you will need to take ART at the same time everyday, for the rest of your life.
 - If you consider complementary, indigenous and/or Chinese herbal medicine, please do so under supervision (some herbal remedies may interact negatively with antiretroviral)
 - **Having a positive attitude about yourself and your life,**
 - Learn to nurture positive emotions – laughter and optimism helps to increase antibody levels and hormones that boost the immune system.
 - Get involved in church/mosque programs and actively participate in community activities.
 - Learn to communicate well – others will respond better to you, your self-esteem will rise, your relationships will improve and you can prevent stress,
 - **In addition**
 - practicing safe sex by using a condom correctly every time whether your partner is HIV positive or not,
 - Get sufficient rest and sleep
 - If you are pregnant, consider the options to prevent transmission to your baby
 - Join a support group – research shows that appropriate support combined with a positive attitude can raise CD4-cell counts, reduce symptoms and possibly prolong lifespan

- Avoid being stressful and be happy always
- Take an HIV holiday when you don't think or talk about it

Prayer points:

As couples, pray that:

- God will help those that are positive to adopt healthy life styles that can help them live happily



Verses for further reading:

Psalms 55:22

Mathew 28:20

Jeremiah 33:2-3

Chapter summary and wrap-up



Time:

20 Minutes



Instructions:

Step one: Remind couples:

- It is possible for someone who has been having sexual relations with a person who is HIV positive and to not get infected.
- It is also possible for an HIV positive woman to give birth to a child who is HIV negative.

Step two: Summarize the chapter:

- Point out that we have looked at the causes of discordance, couple counseling and testing and how mother to child transmission is one way through which HIV is spread. Some of the issues that have been discussed include the following:
- HIV in Malawi is primarily spread through unprotected sex with someone who is already infected. Unprotected means that the couple did not use a condom.
- HIV weakens the body's immune system that helps the body fight disease. When the body's immune system becomes so weak that it cannot fight disease, the person is said to have AIDS.
- There are different ways through which discordance is caused.
- Discordant couples can have a happy married life together.
- Discordant couples do face a lot of challenges and they need a lot of encouragement.
- Couples should test together so they can discuss the results and make plans together for their lives.
- Prevention of mother to child transmission is the responsibility of both partners.

Homework:

Tell participants to continue discussing the topic at home.



Verses for further reading:

Qur'an 2:179

Qur'an 23:6

Qur'an 4:35

Qur'an 42:30

Qur'an 104 :1

Luke 15:11-24

Isaiah 1:18

Chapter 7



Conflict management and resolution

Two people living together every day are bound to have some misunderstandings at some point in time. A happy marriage is not defined by absence of conflict but by the possession of conflict resolution skills. This chapter will help couples understand that conflicts between couples are inevitable and help them build skills so they can deal with conflict constructively.

There are participatory activities that have been included in the chapter that will help couples understand the common causes of conflict, consequences of unresolved conflicts and how they can resolve their conflicts to avoid ending up in abuse or divorce.



Chapter overview

Audience:

This chapter is for those that are married.

Activities:

- Title
- Chapter overview
- Introducing chapter 7
- Looking more closely at cultural beliefs
- Understanding conflict
- A special look at marriage and finances
- The impact of conflicts
- Conflict resolution
- Abuse: When conflict gets out of hand-developing a preparedness plan
- Divorce: When conflicts can't be resolved
- Chapter wrap up
- Home work
- Important verses

**Time:**

4 Hours 10 Minutes

**Materials:**

- Bible/ Qur'an
- Paper and pens

**Preparations for the counselor:**

- Read the whole session beforehand.
- Read the Bible/Quran verses related to the topic and other additional materials.
- Consider other references or quotes that may be useful in the session.



Introducing chapter 7



Time:

20 Minutes



Special note to the counselor:

Do step two, three and four if you are meeting for the first time. But if this is not the first time the group is coming together remind couples that they are supposed to actively participate in all the activities. Also remind them of the rules which you formed together with them.



Chapter overview:

Welcome couples to the group and point out that they will have the opportunity to discuss the topic of conflict management and resolution and how this is related to HIV/AIDS. Couples will discuss how they can constructively resolve their misunderstandings and avoid abuse.



Chapter objectives:

- To help couples know that conflicts can happen even in a loving relationship.
- To help couples realize that if conflicts are not properly handled they can destroy the home.
- To develop expectations and ground rules for the group.



Instructions:

Step one: Explain the topic of conflict management and resolution:

- Many couples have unrealistic expectations that anger and conflict should not exist in a loving relationship.
- Couples need to acquire the techniques necessary to make creative use of anger and conflict.
- If conflict is not handled properly, it can become a destructive force allowing bitterness to dominate the relationship.

Step two: Tell participants that:

- Couples will actively participate in each activity, not just listen. They will help guide the session by contributing information to discussions and participating in activities.

- Couples will be able to discuss feelings, values, and attitudes, as well as factual information.
- Couples will practice important skills to help strengthen their relationship with their partner.

Step three: Find out from couples:

- What they are expecting to gain from participating in this group.
- List their responses and clarify if you feel they are beyond the scope of the sessions.

Step four: Ask couples:

- What rules should the group have to make sure no one is disrespected?
- Suggest any others that you feel are important and be sure to include confidentiality.

Step five: Conclude the activity using the following discussions points:

- Asking questions is an important part of participation.
- There is no right or wrong answer, rather their experience, discussions and commitment to God/Allah will help determine the answers.

Activity 1: Looking more closely at cultural beliefs



Time:

20 minutes



Activity overview:

Couples will begin to look at some of the cultural beliefs or common misunderstandings around conflict management and resolution and how this is related to HIV/AIDS. They will discuss whether these beliefs are true or false and identify what support can be given to better address these issues in their relationship.



Objectives:

- To identify various cultural beliefs and common misunderstandings around conflict management and resolution.
- To provide statements that support couples to manage and resolve their conflicts constructively.



Instructions:

Step one: Tell couples: They will be discussing cultural beliefs and common myths about conflict management and resolution. In looking more closely, we will begin to separate myth from fact.

Step two: Ask participants to mention some of the cultural practices related to conflict management and resolution. Allow time for discussions.

Step three: Some of the cultural beliefs people may come up with include the ones below. Read out to the group the ones that were not mentioned:

- Women should stay in abusive homes.
- It is considered medicine for marriage if the man beats his wife.
- Men are laughed at when they report abuses from the wife.
- The man is the boss of the family and needs to always be obeyed.

Step four: Wrap-up the discussion on cultural beliefs, common sayings and myths with the following points:

- Couples should be encouraged to love one another with true love. When love is in the family, there will be no battering of each other and this will prevent HIV.
- Couples should be encouraged to seek help from outside the marriage when dialogue has failed between the two.
- Men should treat women as fellow human beings created in the image of God/ Allah.

Prayer points:

Pray, as a couple, that:

- God will help couples give up of the cultural beliefs, myths and common saying they have been holding to which are contrary to the word of God.



Verses for further reading:

Genesis 2:22-24

John 15:13-14

Qur'an 49:13

Qur'an 7:28

The prophet peace be upon him said “Shall I tell you about a person who is forbidden to fire, or to whom fire is forbidden ?It is forbidden to anyone who is approachable, easy to be with, lenient and humble”(Al-Trimidhii)

Activity 2: Understanding conflict



Time:

20 Minutes



Materials:

Flip chart papers

- A4 papers
- pens/ makers



Activity overview:

Couples will begin to brainstorm and try to understand the deep meaning of Conflict. Couples will also discuss the common causes of conflicts in the home and how unresolved conflicts can cause one partner to seek love outside the home, a behavior which can bring HIV in the home.



Objectives:

- To help discuss their understanding of conflict.
- To discuss the common causes of conflicts in the home.



Instructions:

Step one: Introduce the activity by telling participants we will be discussing different aspects of conflict, identifying what some of the causes of conflict within the home may be.

- We will discuss that conflict can range from a small argument to abusive behavior and if not handled properly, can have damaging effects on a relationship.

Step two: Tell participants: They will now have a brainstorming exercise in order to have a better understanding of what conflict is and how each person or couple in the room interprets it.

Step three: Ask participants: How they understand conflict. Allow for discussion and record answers on flipchart paper, if available.

Step four: At the top of flip chart paper write the following common causes of conflicts in homes: Poor communication, finances, relations, children, sex, and trust.

Place the labeled flip charts on the walls at different positions. Ask participants to go round the room and rate the causes from 1 to 5. For example, those who feel that poor communication is the number one cause let them write number 1 on the flip chart for poor communication. Let them do the same with the rest.

Step five: After they have rated the causes, bring the group back together for discussion.

- Find out from the group if they are agreeing with the rankings that have been made. Ask a few volunteers to share with others why they rated some higher than others. Let people discuss.
- Is the rating for men different from those of women?
- Do these conflicts seem to affect the husband more than the wife? Or the wife more than the husband? What effect does this have on the marriage?

Step six: Summarize what has been discussed by providing the following additional information:

- Conflict means to be in disagreement or in opposition.
- We are all unique individuals, with our own desires, needs and goals. We love people because of their differences, but these differences also cause frustration when we try to live and work together. It is normal for couples in a relationship to disagree on something. However, we must learn the skills to deal with conflict in a healthy way.
- There are many different causes of conflicts between couples, the most common being the ones we have just looked at. These affect men and women differently.
- These causes are usually ranked differently by men and women. What is the number one cause of conflict for men can be different from that of women.
- The important thing is that all of these topics can cause conflict in the home and men and women need to openly communicate about these issues.
- Couples should also know that conflicts can cause one of the partners to seek love outside the home and this behavior can bring HIV/ AIDS in their relationship.

Prayer points:

Pray, as a couple, that:

- God will help you to resolve your conflicts peacefully.
- You will be patient with your partner bearing in mind that we are all bound to make mistakes in life.



Verses for further reading:

1 Peter 5:7-9

James 1:19

Qur'an 3:133, 154

Activity 3: A special look at marriage and finances



Time:

40 Minutes



Activity overview:

Couples will look at how finances can be a source of conflict in the home and how this can bring HIV in the home. Couples will learn the importance of disclosing their finances to each other.



Objectives:

- To help couples understand the importance of disclosing their finances to each other to avoid conflicts



Instructions:

Step one: Introduce the activity:

- Tell participants we will be discussing different aspects of conflict, focusing much on finances.
- Finances are said to be one of the main causes of conflicts in the home. The presence or absence of money in the home can also cause one of the partners to go out of the home thereby increasing their risk to HIV.

Step two: Ask participants the following questions in plenary. Ask them to feel free to share with the group their responses. If they are not free;

- You can give them small pieces of paper to write down their responses, no names should be included.
- Collect the responses and read out as many as time will allow you.
- Let the group discuss the responses:
 - Do you know the salary or the money your husband/wife make from the business or work s/he does?
 - Do you tell your wife/husband when you plan to buy something or construct a house or send money to your relatives?
 - Do you discuss anything to do with finances with your wife/husband?
 - What type of conflicts does this cause in the home?

Step three: After participants have discussed these questions, read this story to the group;

A story is told of the family of mr and mrs Landilani who had three children, one girl and two boys. mr Landilani is a businessman and the wife is a housewife. mr Landilani does not disclose the amount of money he makes from the business. Every time when he is going for his

businesses, he leaves behind money with the wife to buy things for the home. The money he leaves behind does not suffice as such mrs Landilani found herself a sexual partner. The partner meets with mrs Landilani from time to time and gives her money which she uses to buy additional things for the home. Her daughter too got involved in a sexual relationship with an old man who gives her money to buy things she needs.

Step four: Ask participants to go in groups and discuss the following questions:

- What are the problems that we can see in the family of mr and mrs Landilani?
- What do you think are some of the reasons that mr Landilani does not enough money at home?
- What are some of the problems that can come in the home because of the behavior of mr Landilani, mrs Landilani and their daughter?
- What advice would you give to this family?

Step five: Summarize the activity by emphasizing the following points:

- One major source of family conflict is within the area of finances--specifically, the lack of enough money to pay bills, buy sufficient food and other necessities and have any remaining money for saving.
- A wife who is a saver might marry a spender.
- In a marriage, there is no “my money” and “your money” or “my debts” and “your debts.” There is only our money and our debts. A couple cannot be one if they separate their lives by separating their finances.
- Husbands and wives need to establish a budget either together or with the approval of both. Every item should be discussed, prayed about, and agreed upon. The primary consideration should be to develop a fair, but reasonable, family spending plan.
- Within a marriage relationship the husband and wife are partners who are dedicated to one another. Just as it takes two to make a marriage successful, it takes two to establish a clear line of communication in financial planning.
- God/Allah’s word provides standards for managing money that are essential for marital unity. If couples study these biblical principles, learn them and put them into practice in their marriages, and adhere to those standards, their marriages will be strong and will remain sound.
- Whenever financial issues begin to get out of hand in a marriage, the first thing to do is to pray about them. There is no substitute for God/Allah’s answer.

Prayer points:

As a couple, pray that;

- God/Allah will help couples to be open to each other even with their finances

Activity 4: The impact of conflicts



Time:

20 Minutes



Activity overview:

Couples will discuss the positive and negative impacts of conflict. Through discussing the two role-plays in the activity, couples will appreciate the impact of conflicts between couples and they will relate their discussions to HIV /AIDS.



Objectives:

- To help couples understand that conflicts can have both positive and negative impact on a marriage or relationship.



Instructions:

Step one: Introduce the activity:

- Reviewing the causes of conflict identified in the previous session.
- Tell participants that during this session we will now look at the impact of or the effects of conflicts in the home. These can be both positive and negative.

Step two: Explain to the couples that we will do two different role-plays. Ask for volunteers.

- Choose five volunteers from the group to do a role-play based on the two scenarios below. Do not let the other participants know what the plays are about.
- Give them time to practice while the others are singing or involved in another energizer.
- The counselor should help to make sure the volunteers include the information needed.

Scenario one:

The first three volunteers should do a role-play where the husband and wife will involve themselves in a very hot argument and they should not reach an agreement. Let the volunteers decide the issue they will disagree on. e.g. the wife did not clean the bedroom or the husband forgot to pay school fees for their daughter. After failing to agree, let the husband leave the home angry at his wife. On his way he meets a woman who will attract him into a sexual relationship.

Scenario two:

The second play should be about a couple that had a hot argument and let them resolve their argument/conflict and come to an agreement. At the end they should both learn something about each other.

Step three: After the volunteers have had enough time to practice, ask them to present their role-plays to the larger group.

Step four: Ask the participants to go into two smaller groups to discuss the questions below. One group should discuss the first role-play and the other group the second role-play.

- What did we learn from the role-play?
- Group One- What is the possible negative impact if conflicts aren't resolved?
- Group Two- Can conflict ever be beneficial? In what ways?

Step five: Ask the groups to present back to the larger group the key points from their discussion. Ask the other group if they would like to add anything else.

Step six: Wrap-up and summarize this session by reviewing the following key points:

- Conflicts can be beneficial because through resolution the couple can grow and come to a deeper understanding and love for each other. It can lead to higher satisfaction in the marriage.
- Without conflict, attitudes, behavior, and relationships stay the same, regardless of whether they are fair or not.
- If conflicts aren't resolved, couples may not be able to heal from the upset and continue to grow in their relationship.
- Unresolved conflicts are one of the reasons a spouse may look for a partner outside the home, who he or she thinks "understands them better" – having an extra-marital affair increases the risk of HIV coming into the home.

Prayer points:

Pray, as a couple, that:

- God/Allah will bring peace, love and stability to your home and help you to resolve conflict in a healthy way that will build your relationship.

**Verses for further reading:**

Proverbs 12:16

James 1:19

1 Peter 3:7

Qur'an 51:8 -11

Qur'an 2:195

Activity 5: Conflict resolution



Time:

30 Minutes



Activity overview:

Couples will discuss the meaning of conflict resolution and make use of different scenarios to discuss and share ideas on how conflicts can be resolved constructively.



Objectives:

- To equip couples with constructive conflict resolution strategies.



Instructions:

Step one: Introduce the activity: Reminding participants that while most conflicts can have some benefits; this can only happen if the conflict is resolved constructively.

Step two: Provide the following definition of conflict resolution:

Conflict resolution

Conflict resolution refers to the process of dealing with a dispute or disagreement or a quarrel, by providing for each side's needs and adequately addressing their interests so that they are both satisfied with the outcome

Step three: Ask participants if they agree and/or have anything to add to this definition.

Step four: Divide the participants into smaller groups.

- Let them know they will be coming up with role-plays for different scenarios.
- Each group should work through one of the conflicts and come up with a solution. Give groups 5-10 minutes to develop their role-play.

Possible Scenarios

- The wife wants to buy a new dress but there is no money.
- The husband really wants to go out but the wife has been up all night with a sick child and just wants to stay home.
- One spouse wants the other to go to church/mosque with him/her but the other does not want to.
- The in-laws have come for a surprise visit.
- The wife wants to get employed or start a business activity but the husband does not approve.
- The husband wants a child within a year while the wife wants to wait.
- The husband wants to have sex but the wife is tired.

Step five: Ask each group to present back their role-play. While the group is presenting, ask the larger group to observe:

- Was the conflict resolved?
- What techniques were used to resolve the conflict?
- Were both parties satisfied?
- What might have been done differently to resolve the conflict better?

Step six: After each group has presented, explain to the group the key components of conflict resolution:

- **“Is this disagreement worth arguing about?”**
Is it an important issue? Is this problem hurting me or my partner? If it is not harming anyone, and it is not a serious problem then learn to forget the problem and not discuss the issue.
- **Explore the conflict.**
 - What is the real issue? When there is a disagreement you need to look at the real problem behind the conflict.
 - For example your partner gets very angry when you visit your neighbor. He/she demands that you never see this friend again. What is the reason for their anger? Is it because they want more time with you? Are they jealous of your relationship with this friend? Find out the real reason behind the conflict.
- **Apologize when you are wrong and learn to forgive**
 - Discuss the misunderstanding/problem amicably together. Apologize to your spouse, if you made a mistake. Say you are sorry and state what you are sorry for and ask for forgiveness. This is an important part of resolving a problem. Remember, “to err is human”. We all make mistakes at one time or the other. So, learn to say “sorry” to your spouse.
 - Adapt an accepting rather than a defensive attitude. Remember to pay attention and try to understand what your partner is saying.
 - Have a spirit of give-and-take to one another. You cannot be winning your arguments all the time.
- **Solve one problem at a time**
 - Talk about one problem at a time-the more problems brought up at one time the less likely it is that any of them will be solved.
 - When discussing fresh issues, don’t remind your spouse of wrongs he/she made way back.
- **Be open**
 - Be very open to your spouse in all your dealings and expectations.
- **Choose the right time and place**
 - You may need to arrange a time to talk later. The earlier you address the problem the better, but make sure that both of you are ready to discuss the issue. It is senseless and unproductive to attempt to solve problems when both partners are very angry.

- It is not good to discuss issues in the presence of people or relatives. Be sure that you and your partner are alone so that other people do not meddle in your discussion.
 - It is not good to talk when your partner has just arrived home from work or from somewhere else. It is better to ask your partner when he/she is relaxed and ready for a discussion, not the minute he/she walks in the door. Even the Bible tells us that there are good times and bad times for everything, including times to speak out and times to be silent.
(Ecclesiastes 3:1, 7-8)We need to make sure we speak to our partner at a time which is right for both of us.
 - Choose the best place. Some professionals recommend going to a different place way from home where you will find an atmosphere free of interruptions, with unfamiliar surroundings.
- **Choose the right words to use**
 - Avoid threats especially of divorce, no negative remarks about in-laws, no name calling or putting down your partner, no insults concerning physical appearance, no physical violence, no interrupting when your partner is speaking, no swearing or course words allowed.
 - Do your best to reach agreement before the end of the discussion. Do not leave in the heat of the argument. Use language acceptable to both partners.
 - The goal of conflict resolution should be to make sure both parties are satisfied with the result.
 - Conflicts can be resolved by talking through issues, respecting each others' viewpoint and discussing things from a place of love.
 - **Show understanding**
 - Use "I feel" statements. Make sure you understand what your partner is saying and accept it. Do not criticize their opinions, blame them, or defend yourself. Just listen.
 - Blaming and criticizing your partner will not help you to find a solution. The Bible says that we should use our words to help others.
 - Use your words to work towards a solution, not a new argument.
 - **Seek divine intervention**
 - Put God/Allah first in your entire problem solving endeavors for His divine guidance.

Step seven: Ask the group to reflect on the above. Ask the group to discuss:

- Looking at the above steps to conflict resolution, is there anything you would have done differently in your role-play? Why?

Step eight: Wrap-up and summarize the activity by highlighting the steps to conflict resolution and any key points brought up during the discussion and remind participants of the impact of unresolved conflicts in relation to HIV/AIDS.

Prayer points:

Pray, as a couple, that:

- You will learn to be patient and be able to treat your partner just as God/Allah treats us whenever we have erred.
- You will be careful with the words you use and the way you react to your partners.
- You will let the Lord teach us to live in humility.



Verses for further reading:

James 1:19

Matthew 5:23-24

2 Corinthians 2:7

1 Peter 3:7

Proverbs 9:10

Proverbs 19:11

Luke 17:3

Ephesians 4:29

Qur'an 4:134

Qur'an 42:40-43

Qur'an 4:59



Activity 6: Abuse when conflict gets out of hand- Developing a preparedness plan

**Time:**

60 Minutes

**Special note to the counselor:**

- The following activity is long and may best be presented in two thirty-minute sessions.

**Activity overview:**

Couples will discuss the issue of abuse, which is usually the result of conflicts that get out of hand, and how this is related to HIV/AIDS. Couples will also look at the effects of abuse and will develop a preparedness plan.

**Objectives:**

- To give couples information on where they can get help when they are being abused.
- Help churches/mosques come up with committees, which will always be there to help abusers and the abused.
- To help couples know the negative effects of abuse and how they can avoid abusing each other.

**Instructions:****Step one:** Explain to the group:

- We will be discussing a serious but sensitive issue that is often not discussed outside of the home. Tell participants that:
- While conflict has its role in a marriage, sometimes it can lead to anger and abuse.
- Abuse should never be tolerated in a marriage.
- Abuse happens when one person wants to have power over another person.
- Abuse deeply scars the emotions of a person and usually greatly alters their perception and their ability to live life to its fullest.
- Abuse is an issue that both men and women should be concerned with.

Step two: Ask participants to brainstorm on the different types of abuse. Record their answers on a flip chart.**Step three:** After they are finished, review the following key points about abuse:

- Abuse is the most destructive tool that can be used by anyone against another person.

- There are different types of abuse and they are all designed to destroy and not to build. The different types of abuse mentioned above can be grouped into the following:

Physical abuse: Beating and any form of body torture to subdue and control another person.

Sexual abuse: Forced sex, rape, (both in and outside marriage), adultery, incest, withholding sex from your partner.

Verbal abuse: Speaking things that hurt your partner psychologically or things said in order to gain control over someone's mind.

Spiritual (religious) abuse: Refusing one from attending church/mosque functions, despising ones religious beliefs.

Economic abuse: Not providing for basic needs (food, shelter, etc.); hindering one from engaging in an economic activity e.g. employment of business activity.

Step four: Tell the group:

- Each couple will develop a preparedness plan that can provide guidance to the husband and wife. Explain to the group that this plan will:
- Act as a contract to each other to help prevent abuse in the home.
- Identify the steps the couple commits to in the face of abuse.
- Identify the resources and people in the family, community, and church/mosque, who can help if needed.

Step five: Divide the group into couples. Be sure to explain that the plan:

- Will have two essential parts.
- An emergency action plan, which details what to do when abuse occurs.
- A prevention plan, which describes what to do to prevent abuse from occurring in the home.
- Should be developed to protect the victim (the person who is being abused).

Step six: Ask the couples to answer the following questions together:

Emergency plan

- How do you recognize that abuse is happening in your relationship?
- What steps can you take if one of you is being abused?
- Where can you go in your community if:
- You are being abused?
- You are abusing your partner?
- Identify locations where you feel safe, such as the Church/Mosque, Police, and Health Center.
- Who can you talk to if:
- You are being abused?

- You are abusing your partner?
- Identify people you trust to protect you or to help you stop the abuse. These can be people in the Church/Mosque, family members, friends, community leaders, police officers, and healthcare professionals.

Prevention plan

- What steps can you take to prevent abuse from happening in the home? These may include:
- Leave the room or home if you are too angry to talk. Once you have calmed down, return to discuss what has happened.
- Set aside time to talk about issues or problems you see in the home. Deal with them before the situation becomes abusive.
- Agree to listen to your partner as he/she explains his/her side.
- Do not disregard the feelings of your partner.
- Seek counseling if you feel you cannot control your anger and are prone to abuse.
- Avoid doing the things that provoke your partner

Step seven: After each couple has developed their plan, ask them both to sign it, in recognition that they will follow these steps if abuse should enter the home.

Step eight: Bring the group back together and ask them to present their plans to the larger group.

Step nine: After everyone has presented their plan, review the following key points:

- If you follow the plan you developed with your partner, it will help to prevent abuse in your home, as well as provide guidance if abuse happens.
- The basis of the relationship between husband and wife is affection and mercy.
- Abusive behavior puts your partner's life at risk and it can also cause the abused partner to seek love outside the home. This behavior increases the risk of HIV coming in the home.
- Couples are bound to have some misunderstandings at some point of time. This is just a part of adjustment that marriage entails. These misunderstandings should never be allowed to develop into abusive behavior.
- Violence should be avoided in your family. Mutual respect, love, sharing and caring for one another should be the order of the day.
- Resolve all your conflicts amicably and let life continue. Forgive whatever wrong or mistake your spouse has done knowing that we are all bound to make mistakes in life.
- Forgiveness does not mean one must return to an abusive situation, rather one should protect themselves first and learn to forgive their partner while staying safe.
- When dealing with cases of abuse, it is important to look at the situation from both points of view and not just automatically blame one of the partners. In many cases, the woman is blamed for the abuse without looking at the real causes of the conflict.
- If abuse is happening in the home, the couple should seek counseling together.

- It is not God/Allah's will that homes should be in trouble, either abusing each other or beating one another. It is the enemy that has brought this and should be resisted so as to achieve the counsel of God/Allah for homes.

Prayer points:

Pray, as a couple, that:

- The church/mosque will take responsibility in addressing the issues of abuse of women and will love and support those who have suffered abuse.
- For healing for those that have suffered abuse from their partners.
- If you are in an abusive relationship (either the abuser or victim), you will find the strength and support you need in your community to end the abuse.



Verses for further reading:

Qur'an 30:20-21

Qur'an 3:104

Qur'an 42:10-12

Genesis 2:23

Mathew 6:14-15

Mathew 7:12

1 Peter 3:7

Note to Counselor:

- If you sense someone in the group is being abused or someone comes to you to discuss being abused, make time to meet with them outside the session to further counsel them.
- If someone comes to you and confides that they are being abused, they have most likely been abused for some time and they are now fearful.
- You may also want to refer them to a Victim Support Unit for further assistance.
- You should help both the victim and the perpetrator seek counseling.
- Before sending someone back into an abusive relationship, remember that you may be putting his/her life at risk.



Chapter summary and wrap-up



Time:

20 Minutes



Instructions:

Step one: Remind couples: It is possible for conflicts to happen between couples who love each other and are God/Allah.

Step two: Summarize the chapter:

- Point out that we have looked at some important points about conflict between couples, which include:
- Two people living together every day are bound to have some misunderstandings at some point of time.
- Conflict if not handled properly, can become a destructive force allowing bitterness to dominate the relationship. Sometimes it can lead to anger and abuse.
- If conflicts aren't resolved, couples may not be able to heal from the upset and continue to grow in their relationship.
- Unresolved conflicts are one of the reasons a spouse may look for a partner outside the home, who he or she thinks "understands them better" – having an extra-marital affair increases the risk of HIV coming into the home.

Homework:

Tell participants to continue discussing the topic at home. Encourage couples to:

- Reflect on how they resolve their conflicts and discuss how they can improve and adopt what they have learnt



Verses for further reading:

- Psalms 128:1-2,
- Ruth 1:15-17,
- Mathew. 19:9
- Qur'an 2: 224-237
- Qur'an 4:35
- Qur'an 30:21
- Qur'an 3:36, 133-134
- Qur'an 42:30.
- Qur'an 65:1



Chapter 8



Marriage and the blessings of children

Children are a blessing from God, but this does not mean that if they are not there then you are not blessed. This session will help couples to adopt behaviors that will help them to continue enjoying their marriage in the presence or absence of children.

There are activities that have been included in the chapter that will help couples discuss how the absence of children can cause problems in the home and how to deal with those problems. The activities will also help couples discuss the changes that come with the arrival of children and how they can affect the love they once had for each other.

Chapter overview

Audience:

This chapter is for those that are married.

Activities:

- Title
- Chapter overview
- Introducing chapter 8
- Looking more closely at cultural beliefs
- Understanding why children are a blessing
- Changes that occur when children starts coming
- Balancing love for the spouse and child
- When children are not there
- Chapter wrap-up
- Homework
- Important verses



Time:

2 Hours 50 Minutes



Materials:

- Bible/Qur'an
- Paper and pens



Preparations for the Counselor:

- Read the whole session before hand.
- Read the Bible/Quran verses related to the topic and other additional materials.
- Consider other references or quotes that may be useful in the session.



Introducing chapter 8



Time:

20 Minutes



Special note to the counselor:

Do step two, three and four if you are meeting for the first time. But if this is not the first time the group is coming together remind couples that they are supposed to actively participate in all the activities. Also remind them of the rules which you formed together with them.



Chapter overview:

Welcome couples to the group and point out that they will have the opportunity to discuss the topic of marriage and the blessings of children. Couples will discuss what some of the causes of childlessness are and how they can maintain their love for each other when children start coming in the home. The discussions in all the activities will be related to HIV/AIDS.



Chapter objectives:

- To better understand what it means when we say that children are a blessing from God.
- Understand that marriage even without children is complete.
- Understand the changes that may occur when children come into the home.
- Be able to know how they can blend the love for a spouse and child.



Instructions:

Step one: Explain the topic to the couples by sharing with them the following:

- Children are a blessing from God and that their presence or absence should not affect the couple's oneness.
- Psalm 127:3-5, Quran 42:49 clearly say that children ought to be regarded as a blessing from God/Allah and couples should celebrate their arrival.
- However, most couples find it difficult to blend love for a partner and that of a child. If this is not looked at critically, it can become destructive leading to one indulging in extra marital affairs or marriage break up.
- In addition, some couples that do not have children may find themselves in conflict, which may lead to the break-up of marriage or extra marital affairs. The extra marital affairs may bring HIV in the home.

Step two: Tell participants that:

- Couples will actively participate in each activity, not just listen. They will help guide the session by contributing information to discussions and participating in activities.
- Couples will be able to discuss feelings, values, and attitudes, as well as factual information.

- Couples will practice important skills to help strengthen their relationship with their partner.

Step three: Find out from the couples:

- What they are expecting to gain from participating in this group.
- List their responses and clarify if you feel they are beyond the scope of the sessions.

Step four: Ask couples:

- What rules should the group have to make sure no one is disrespected?
- Suggest any others that you feel are important and be sure to include confidentiality.

Step five: Conclude the activity using the following discussions points:

- Asking questions is an important part of participation
- There is no right or wrong answer, rather their experience, discussions and commitment to God/Allah will help determine the answers.

Activity 1: Looking more closely at cultural beliefs



Time:

20 Minutes



Activity overview:

Couples will begin to look at some of the cultural beliefs or common sayings around having or not having children. They will discuss whether these beliefs are true or false and identify what support can be given to better address these issues in their relationship.



Objectives:

- To identify various cultural beliefs and common misunderstandings around having or not having children.
- To provide true statements that support the belief that children are a blessing from God.



Instructions:

Step one: Tell couples: They will be discussing cultural beliefs and common myths about having or not having children. In looking more closely, we will begin to separate myth from fact.

Step two: Ask participants to mention some of the cultural practices related to pregnancy, delivery, having or not having children or children in general. Allow time for discussions.

Step three: Some of the cultural beliefs people may come up with include the ones below. Read out to the group the ones that were not mentioned:

- Couples should stop having sex when the woman is six months pregnant and should resume six months after delivery.
- It is the responsibility of the mother to take care of the child.
- A woman who goes out when she is pregnant risks losing the pregnancy.
- During the first sex following delivery, the man should withdraw and ejaculate outside the vagina. The sperms should be rubbed all over the body of the child (kumupereka mwana kumalo). This they say helps the child to have strong bones.
- Those who do not have children are called all sorts of names (kukhomera ku dowa, kugwa mu mpapaya, chumba, gojo).
- Once a woman delivers a child, the vagina loses elasticity. This causes men to go out to look for virgins.

- After a woman gives birth her beauty fades away.
- Male children are better than female children.
- If you are lazy during pregnancy, you will give birth to weak children.
- The more children you have the more of a man you are.
- Children are considered as a source of wealth.

Step four: Wrap-up the discussion on the cultural beliefs, common sayings and myths with the following points:

- There are different cultural issues that come in when the woman is pregnant. These include beliefs that can cause tension in the family, for example: how to care for the child; role of the wife in the home etc.
- It is important for the participants to know that these cultural beliefs need to be understood by both parties and appropriate adjustments should be made by the couple.
- Children are a blessing from God, their absence or presence should not disturb the love the couples have for one another.
- Couples should be encouraged to remain faithful to each other in the absence or presence of children.
- Couples should also be counseled on when to stop and resume sex before and after delivery and how to handle issues of miscarriage.
- Women should not be considered child-making machines. Their health is put at risk if they give birth to many children.
- Couples should trust God/Allah to give them children if He wants in His own time.
- Couples should visit a specialist who can help them understand the causes and potential solutions to infertility (i.e. not being able to have children).
- Women should make sure they maintain their beauty after giving birth.
- Couples should practice child spacing and family planning.

Prayer points:

Pray, as a couple, that:

- God/Allah will help couples give up the cultural beliefs, myths and common sayings they have been holding to which are contrary to the word of God.



Verses for further reading:

Psalms 127:3-4

Qur'an 66:6

Qur'an 16:58 – 59

Qur'an 61:8 - 9

Activity 2: Understanding why children are a blessing



Time:

20 Minutes



Activity overview:

Couples will begin to brainstorm on why they think children are a blessing from God. With spiritual perspective, couples will understand that children are a blessing from God.



Objectives:

- To help couples appreciate that children are a gift from God.



Step one: Introduce the activity: Explaining that during this session we will look more closely at children in marriage and begin to explore how children are a blessing from God.

Step two: Ask participants to brainstorm why they think children are a blessing. Record their answers on flipchart paper, if available.

Step three: After the participants have finished brainstorming, share the following verses:

- Quran: 4:1**
 - All mankind! Reverence your guardian Lord, who created you from a single person, created, of like nature, his mate, and from them twain scattered (like seeds) countless men and women:- reverence Allah, through whom you demand your mutual (rights), and (reverence) the wombs (that bore you): for Allah ever watches you.
 - The Prophet (PBUH) said, marry and multiply because on the day of reckoning I will be proud of my followers.
- Gen:1:26 -27**
 - God created man in his image and likeness.
 - He commanded them to be fruitful and responsible. Therefore children are regarded as a blessing from God.



Prayer points:

Pray, as a couple, that:

- God will help couples realize that children are a blessing from God/ Allah.
- You will be able to love and respect your children as true members of your family.

Verses for further reading:

Jeremiah 11:29

Psalms 127:3

Qur'an 42:49

Activity 3: Changes that may occur when children start coming



Time:

30 Minutes



Activity overview:

Couples will discuss the changes that happen to the man as well as the woman when children start coming into the family. They will also discuss how these changes should be handled so that their love for each other is maintained and that neither of them will go out of the home, a step which can bring HIV in the relationship.



Objectives:

- To help couples understand that some of the changes that occur when children start coming are normal.
- To help couples learn how they can handle the changes that come with the blessings of children.



Instructions:

Step one: Introduce the session:

- Let participants know that numerous changes occur in the marriage when children start coming.
- These changes show themselves in various ways during pregnancy and after the child is born.
- While many of these changes are wonderful, some can cause tension within the marriage.
- It is important for couples to communicate openly and honestly about the changes and resolve any conflicts that may arise.

Step two: Divide the participants in two groups, keeping men and women separate. Ask each group to think about and answer each of the following questions:

Men

- What changes do you see in women when they are pregnant and when they have delivered? These changes can be negative or positive.
- How do you react to these changes? How does your behavior change towards your wife? How does it affect your love for her?
- How do you think your wife wants to be treated when she is pregnant or after she has delivered?

Women

- What changes do you experience when you are pregnant and after you have delivered?

- What are the changes you see in the behavior of your husband? These changes can be negative or positive.
- How do you react to these changes (in them and their husbands)? How does your behavior change towards your husband? How does it affect your love for him?
- How do you want to be treated when you are pregnant or when you have delivered?

Step three: Let the groups present their responses and allow for discussion.

Step four: Wrap-up and summarize the session by reviewing the following key points:

- Below are some of changes that occur during the stages in discussion

Biological

- The appearance of the woman changes in terms of her physical appearance i.e. body tenderness; attraction and shape. In some cases, such changes may put off her husband. In some cases her husband may no longer feel attracted to her, while some men feel their wives are even more beautiful when they are pregnant.
- The wife's eating habits may also well change, she may crave things she doesn't usually like, or not be able to eat things that normally she enjoys. Sometimes spitting and pica may result. Often women feel nauseous when they are pregnant, especially during the first 3 months and may have difficulty eating or may have to vomit, especially in the mornings.
- The wife should try to avoid foods or things that provoke nausea.
- The wife should take well balanced meals that include carbohydrates (nsima, potatoes, cassava, rice etc), proteins (meat, fish, beans, ground nuts etc) and Mineral salts (vegetables, fruits).
- The husband should be understanding that his wife may not be feeling well and assist with activities in the home.

Anatomical:

- The body structure changes in the wife, discomfort in sleeping or sitting, restlessness, etc
- One way to ease the discomfort can be to try to use more pillows.
- The husband should try to help make the wife as comfortable as possible.
- The changes in body structure may also have effects on sex styles. There is need for the couple to discuss sexual matters in the home. Advise couples to make sure that they change sex positions to ones that are comfortable during pregnancy.

Emotional

- Due to hormonal changes in the body, the woman may become emotionally affected. For example she may cry for what seems like no reason, or be extra sensitive to certain things.
- This is not something she can control and it is important to remain patient during these times.

Social

- In addition to the emotional changes, women may start shifting their attention away from their husbands to focus more on the child they are going to have. She may also start paying less attention to her appearance especially if she is having a hard time adjusting to the changes happening in her body. It is important for couples to notice when this is happening and discuss this openly.

Economical

- There is one more mouth that needs to be fed and cared for. This means the couple may need to make sacrifices in their own life in order to properly provide for their child. Couples should discuss and prepare for this when deciding to have a child.
- Adequate counseling should be provided to the couple to enable them to handle these changes.

Prayer points:

Pray, as a couple, that:

- Couples will have unconditional love towards their spouses.
- Husbands will support their wives when they are pregnant and with the caring of the child.
- Husbands will have the strength to overcome some cultural and social norms that prevent them from assisting and understanding their wife during pregnancy and after delivery.



Verses for further reading:

Qur'an 64:15

Qur'an 42:49

John 15:13-14

Romans 12:9-10

Activity 4: Balancing love for the spouse and child



Time:

30 Minutes



Activity overview:

Couples will discuss how they can maintain love for each other even when they have children. Couples will also look at how sharing the responsibility of taking care of the child can help strengthen love between couples.



Objectives:

- To help couples learn on how they can maintain love for each other even when they have children.
- To encourage couples to share the responsibility of caring for the child.



Instructions:

Step one:

Introduce the activity:

- Let participants know that this session is about keeping their love for each other alive, even after the arrival of children.
- It is not uncommon for couples to lose interest in each other after children are born.
- It is necessary, in a marriage, for couples to make time for each other.

Step two: Ask participants to brainstorm on how the coming of children in the family can affect the love couples had for each other when they first came together.

Step three: After the group has had the chance to discuss wrap-up the activity and summarize the following key points:

- There is need to review the roles of both husband and wife as children come.
- Parents should know that the child is theirs and not for their parents or relatives. There is hence the need for them to agree how to raise the child.
- Husbands should provide adequate support to the wife in caring for the baby. Keep in mind that the responsibility of caring for the child is not only for the woman.
- Husbands usually leave all the responsibility to the woman. As such the woman is seen to be giving much attention to the child neglecting the husband.
- The couple should set aside time where they can be together only the two of them.

- Women should also be encouraged to make sure they continue taking good care of themselves so that they continue looking good and attractive. This will help to keep the man in the home. The man should also make sure he provides the resources.
- Husbands should understand that the woman's body goes through many changes after having a child. Each woman is different but this can include weight gain or other physical and emotional changes. This is all part of giving birth.

Prayer points:

Pray, as a couple, that:

- Couples will not allow the presence of children in the home to disturb their oneness but rather strengthen their love for each other.
- You will support each other in caring for your children.
- You will have the patience and understanding as changes occur within your marriage and that God/ Allah will give you the strength to adapt to these changes in a positive way.



Verses for further reading:

Qur'an 16:72

Qur'an 7:189

Qur'an 64:14

Qur'an 8:6-63

Genesis 1:27

Romans 12:9-10

John 15:13-14

Activity 4: When children are not there



Time:

30 Minutes



Activity overview:

Participants will discuss some of the challenges couples who do not have children face. They will also look at what some of the factors are that may cause couples not to have children. The activity will help couples to further discuss the risks that can be brought by wrong advice from friends or relatives.



Objectives:

- To give hope to couples who do not have children.
- To help couples who have children realize the challenges couples who do not have children go through so that they are able to encourage them.
- To help couples understand why other couples do not have children.



Instructions:

Step one: Introduce the activity:

- Let participants know that not everyone is able to have children.
- This can happen for a variety of reasons and it is necessary to try to better understand someone's situation before placing judgment.
- As a group we will begin to explore what some of these reasons may be in order to be more tolerant and understanding of our partner and/or others.

Step two: Read the story below to the participants.

Mr. and mrs. Pawpaw have been married for over 5 years but do not have a child. Worth noting is that the couple is God/Allah fearing, love each other and have remained faithful to each other. Meanwhile, the man is receiving pressure to have children or to seek another partner who can provide him with children from relatives and the woman is receiving pressure from her friends too. The couple decides to seek counsel from spiritual leaders.

Step three: After reading the story, explain to the group that we will be doing role-plays.

Step four: Divide the participants into smaller groups and assign the following sketches:

- Couple getting pressure from relatives and friends to have a child.
- Couple seeking counsel from spiritual leaders because they are unable to have children.

Step five: Once the groups are prepared, ask them to present their role-plays to the larger group.

Step six: After the groups have each presented, discuss the following questions:

- What kind of pressure was the couple getting from relatives and friends?
- What impact did the pressure have on the couple?
- What advice did you hear from the spiritual leaders?
- In the context of HIV and AIDS, what do you think are the risks that wrong advice can bring in the marriage?

Step seven: Wrap-up and summarize the session by reviewing the following key points:

- It is important to know that there are various reasons why couples may not have children. Some of them could be:

Medical

- A woman or man may have a medical problem that may prevent them from having children.
- Either the woman or man may be infertile. However most times the woman is blamed, but it could very much be the man who is infertile.

Social and economic:

- Some individuals or couples may have reasons for not wanting children right away, including they are still pursuing education, cannot afford them or are ready.
- Deciding when and how many children to have is a decision that should be made between husband and wife.
- Most couples do not know why they do not have children and that is what shocks them most.
- Ask participants not to give in to the pressure to go out of the marriage to have children as this may increase their risk of getting HIV.
- Advise couples to be loving parents and family by adopting children who have lost their parents.

Prayer points:

Pray, as a couple, that:

- Couples will understand that God/ Allah is the healer and the provider of all our needs.
- That God/ Allah will strengthen the faith of couples who do not have children and give them the patience to wait upon and know that God/ Allah makes all things beautiful in His own time.
- That God/ Allah will help couples accept the situation they are in, and move on with life bearing in mind that all things work together for good to those who love the lord. Pray that there will be peace and love in these homes.



Verses for further reading:

- Qur'an 42:50
Jeremiah 11:29
Romans 8:26
Genesis 1:27
Eccl.3:1



Chapter summary and wrap-up



Time:

20 Minute



Instructions:

Step one: Remind couples: Children are a blessing from God and that their absence of presence should not affect the love they have for each other.

Step two: Summarize the chapter:

- Point out that we have looked at important points about having or not having children, which include:
- Understanding that children are a blessing from God.
- There are many reasons why other couples do not have children and some of them do not know why this is the case.
- Giving in to the pressure to go out of the marriage to look for children should be discouraged as this may increase their risk of getting HIV.
- Couples should know there are a lot of changes which will occur when children start coming in the home. Some of these changes are natural and couples should prepare for this.
- The changes should not be allowed to affect the love they have for each other, rather couples should maintain their love even in the presence of children.

Homework:

Tell participants to continue discussing the topic at home. Encourage couples to:

- Ask participants to look at how they have been relating since the coming of children in the home or because of the absence of children in the home.
- What are the things they need to change, improve or stop in order to maintain love for each other?
- Discuss how they can remain faithful to each other.



Verses for further reading:

Psalms 127:3-5;

Matthew 19:14

Qur'an 65:6

Qur'an 2:223



Chapter 9

WELCOME TO
TIDYE RESTAURANT



Enjoying life and growing together

This is the last chapter in the guide and after going through all the sessions in this guide, couples will be asked to reflect on all what they have learned and plan how they will put it into practice. At the end the couples will be given certificates as 'graduates'. This certificate also symbolizes a renewal of marriage vows and their commitment to each other.

The chapter also includes participatory activities that will help the couples to think of how they will put in practice the skills and knowledge acquired so as to live happily together. Men and women will be asked to write down what they think they could do better and want to change and those things they are doing that strengthen their love and marriage and that they will maintain.

Chapter overview

Audience:

The chapter is for those that are married

Activities:

- Title
- Chapter overview
- Introducing chapter 9
- Looking more closely at cultural beliefs
- Reflection on the topics covered
- Tying the knot
- Important verses



Time:

1 hour 10 Minutes



Materials:

- Bible/ Qur'an
- Paper and pens



Preparations for the counselor:

- Read the whole session before hand.
- Read the Bible/Quran verses related to the topic and other additional materials.
- Consider other references or quotes that may be useful in the session.

Introducing chapter 9



Time:

20 Minutes



Special preparations for the counselor:

- This is a special day. Encourage couples to dress in a special way for the sake of their mate.
- Prepare special certificates for the “graduates” which could serve the dual purpose of marriage vow renewal.
- Identify one of the religious leaders present to lead the couples in the public declaration/renewal of the marriage vows.
- Arrange for photographs of this final Chapter.
- Share a meal afterwards.



Chapter overview:

Welcome couples to the group and point out that they will have the opportunity to reflect all they have learnt in this guide by looking at the topic of “Enjoying Life and Growing Together”. Couples will at the end renew their marriage vows and promise to put in practice all they have learnt throughout the discussions of the different topics in the guide.



Chapter objectives:

- To better understand how couples can enjoy their married life and grow together and factors that will ensure continued marital harmony.
- Discuss some of the things they will start doing and those that they will change in order to make each other happy.



Instructions:

Step one: Explain the topic of “Enjoying life and growing together” by discussing the following key points:

- Marriage in the religious context is supposed to be a life-long relationship and is meant to be enjoyed and not endured.
- The assurance of continued happiness in marriage requires attention to the principles that underlie the development of happy homes.
- Research shows that the rate of divorce is increasing. Does the increase in divorce rate indicate that it is impossible to live happily forever after?

Step two: Remind couples of the following:

- Couples will actively participate in each activity, not just listen. They will help guide the session by contributing information to discussions and participating in activities.

- Couples will be able to discuss feelings, values, and attitudes, as well as factual information.
- Couples will practice important skills to help strengthen their relationship with their partner.

Prayer points:

Pray, as a couple, that:

- Your home will be happy where love, patience, and communication abound.



Verses for further reading:

1 Thessalonians 5:16

John 15:13-14

Ephesians 5:26-29

Qur'an 30:21

Activity 1: Looking more closely at cultural beliefs



Time:

20 minutes



Activity overview:

Couples will begin to look at some of the cultural beliefs or common misunderstandings around enjoying married life and growing together. They will discuss whether these beliefs are true or false and identify what support can be given to better address these issues in their relationship.



Objectives:

- To identify various cultural beliefs and common misunderstandings around enjoying married life and growing together
- To provide true statements that support couples to enjoy their married life and grow together.



Instructions:

Step one: Introduce the activity: Tell couples they will be discussing cultural beliefs and common myths about married life. In looking more closely, we will begin to separate myth from fact.

Step two: Ask participants to mention some of the cultural practices related to couples enjoying their married life and growing together. Allow time for discussions.

Step three: Some of the cultural beliefs people may come up with include the ones below. Read out to the group the ones that were not mentioned:

- It is not possible for married people to live happily.
- If a married man is helping the wife with household chores or loves the wife so much, he has been given love potions.

Step four: Wrap up the discussion on the cultural beliefs, common misunderstandings and myths with the following points:

- There are many couples that remain happy in their marriage. Although this is possible, many people find it hard to understand and they usually say “these people love each other as if they are still in courtship (“angokhala ngati ndi chibwenzi” or “banja sangakondane choncho”).
- A happy married life is possible if the couple continues loving each other as they did when they were courting.

- Loving your partner and helping him/her with responsibilities does not mean you have been given love potions, rather you are taking the time to support your partner and have a happy home.

Prayer points:

Pray, as a couple, that:

- God /Allah will help you to give up of the cultural beliefs, myths and common sayings they have been holding to which are contrary to the word of God/ Allah and prevent you from better understanding your partner.



Verses for further reading:

Mathew 19:5-6

Qur'an 33:21

The Prophet Muhammad Peace be upon him, replied when one of his companions Abu Sufyan Sakhri interviewed by Heraclius asked what the Prophet PBUH instructed them to do? “To worship God alone with no partners, leave harmful traditions of our fathers..(Al-Bukhar)

Activity 2: Reflection on what has been covered



Time:

20 Minutes



Chapter overview:

Couples will reflect on the topics covered in the previous chapters and discuss how they can live happily together in their marriage.



Objectives:

- To help couples remember what they have learned in the previous chapters and plan on how they can put these lessons to practice.



Instructions:

Step one: Introduce the session: Let participants know we will be reviewing the topics we have covered from the beginning.

Step two: Divide men and women into two separate groups.

- Ask the smaller groups to reflect upon each of the topics covered and share highlights of what they have learned.
- Ask the groups to list the following:
 - What are some of the things you can begin to do to show your partner you love and cherish them?
 - What are some of the things you would like your partner to begin doing so you can continue living happily?

Step three: Bring the groups back together and allow them to present.

Step four: Explain to the group:

- These ideas are general and it is necessary for each couple to decide what will work for them.

Step five: Divide the group into couples and ask each couple to discuss the same questions as above:

- What are some of the things you can begin to do to show your partner you love and cherish him/her?
- What are some of the things you would like your partner to begin doing so you can continue living happily ?

Step six: Once the couples have finished discussing, bring them back to the large group. Wrap-up and summarize the session by reminding participants:

- It is important to be open and honest about what makes you happy in a marriage.
- If something is bothering you, you should be able to discuss it with your partner.
- If your partner has a problem, you need to be patient and understanding. It is important to listen and to make the changes if possible.
- Part of being married is being flexible. This will allow you to grow in your marriage.

Prayer points:

Pray, as a couple, that:

- You will be able to put in practice what you have learned so that love and peace will prevail within your home.



Verses for further reading:

Mathew 19:5-6

1 Corinthians 7:10

Qur'an 25:54

Activity 3: Tying the knot



Time:

30 Minutes



Activity overview:

Couples will discuss how they will improve their marriage. The activity will help individual couples to reflect on how they have been relating to each other and the areas they need to change in order to strengthen their marriage.



Objectives:

- To help couples plan how they will strengthen their marriage through reflection and discussion.



Instructions:

Step one: Introduce the activity: Let couples know that we will be reviewing the past chapters by reflecting on before and after.

Step two: Quickly review each of the chapters. You can use the summary of chapters at the end of this guide if you need help remembering.

Step three: Divide the group into couples. Ask them to think of all they have learned from the past chapters and to do the following exercise:

- Think of how you have been relating as a couple before going through these sessions. What things have you discovered which you were not doing right?
- What new things have they learned and are planning to implement? Write them down and keep them in a safe place-in the bedroom or anywhere in the house.

Step four: Wrap-up the discussion and summarize the key points:

- Husbands and wives should work towards giving their partner pleasure so that their relationship is stronger and more satisfying
- Marriage like anything else of value requires time and work. Couples should know that for their marriage to be happy and successful, it requires constant nurturing.
- Couples should make sure that they find time to be together. They should also know that one of the modern enemies of togetherness is over commitment. In the business of our life, we often overlook the priority of friendship. Give priority to your family.
- Marriages fail when couples fail to meet their spouse's needs i.e love, esteem, and providing a nurturing environment for each other's growth.

- The following points summarize the characteristics of a happy and healthy marriage relationship:

Commitment: In a healthy long-term relationship, the couple understands that they have made a long-term commitment. They are committed to care for the other person and work through difficulties. Healthy couples don't think about themselves, but focus on what is best for the couple; they are committed to each other.

Satisfaction: Individuals in a healthy long-term relationship are satisfied and feel happy about life. They are content with their own life, and their relationship with their partner.

Communication: Healthy couples know how to communicate with one another with respect and compromise. They have learned how to communicate well.

Conflict resolution: Every long-term relationship has conflict. In a healthy long-term relationship, each person works together to resolve problems when they are small, so that they do not grow into bigger problems that may hurt the relationship.

No violence: Violence may be physical (hitting, or pushing) or include emotional and verbal abuse (harsh words and threats against a partner or child). Violence is not healthy for any relationship.

Sexual faithfulness: Trust and fidelity are essential for a healthy long-term relationship. When there is infidelity or fear of infidelity, the relationship is in trouble.

Quality time: In healthy long-term relationships, couples make time for one another and do things together that they enjoy.

Intimacy and emotional support: Healthy couples support and care for each other with affection, intimacy, and emotional support. They show their love in many ways; not only through sex.

Commitment to children: In healthy long-term relationships the couple is committed to caring for the children born or adopted into the family. It is possible for healthy long-term relationships to exist without children, but if children are present, healthy couples are committed to raising their children well.

Step five: Now that you have all completed this guide, it is time to celebrate. Depending on how you see fit, host a celebration ceremony for the couples, highlighting their achievements.

Prayer points:

Pray, as a couple, that:

- You will be able to use the skills and knowledge you have acquired within your own family and with other couples.
- Pray that God/Allah will help you to live happily together with your partner, honoring God/ Allah's word, while respecting and loving your partner.



Verses for further reading:

John 15:13-14

Mathew 19:5-6

Genesis 2:24

Qur'an 3:103

Qur'an 66:6

Qur'an 9:71



Summary of the whole guide

The guide has looked at a number of issues that affect people when it comes to marriage.

- Chapter one looked at some of the factors young people need to consider when contemplating marriage. These are issues that can contribute to making their married life a happy one or one full of misery. Young people should not overlook these issues as they will affect their life for good or bad.
- Chapter two looked at marriage as a gift from God/Allah and the need for all to honor it. The chapter has helped couples to be reminded of their responsibilities and the need to keep their marriage vows. Couples also had a chance of discussing how they can express love to each other and make married life full of life and love.
- Chapter three looked at how couples can make their married life a happy one. It also covered the most important issue of communication. Couples have been reminded of the important role communication plays for couples and how its absence can affect their marriage. The chapter further explored the causes of poor communication between couples and they can improve their communication.
- Chapter four examined sex as a gift God/Allah gave for married people and how couples can make their sex life a more enjoyable one. The chapter further looked at the role communication plays for couples to have a satisfying sex life.
- Chapter five explored the causes and consequences of extramarital relationships. The chapter helps couples to discuss the common causes of extramarital relationships and how it can be avoided. The consequences include acquiring HIV, which can be passed on to the partner. The chapter also helps couples to understand the risks involved with MCP.
- In Chapter six couples are given a chance to look at discordance and how this comes about. They are given advice on how this should be handled as it doesn't necessarily mean that one was unfaithful. Issues of PMTCT have also been covered in order for couples to make informed choices about having children.
- Chapter seven looked at how conflicts can be resolved. Abuse has been deemed unacceptable in conflict and divorce has been discouraged in the chapter. Instead couples have been given skills on how they can constructively resolve their misunderstandings and maintain a good relationship with one another. Couples are also reminded that conflicts for married people are inevitable and can help the marriage grow.
- Chapter eight explored the topic of children as a blessing from God/Allah and how their absence or presence should not disturb the love couples have for one another. The chapter also reminds couples of some of the changes they should expect when children start coming in the home, the responsibility they both have for the children.
- The last chapter, chapter nine, is a summary of all that has been covered in the guide and it calls upon couples to reflect on all that they have learnt and discuss how they will put it into practice and live happily ever after.



Evaluation/Feedback form for users of the couple counseling guide

We want to hear from you!

Please complete and send this form to us. Your response will help us to revise and improve the Couple Counseling Guide.

Send To:

**Bridge Project, Johns Hopkins University Bloomberg School of Public Health
Center for Communication Programs,
P.O. Box 30782, Lilongwe 3, Malawi
Fax No: (265) 01 750 496**

1. Please tick the people/groups that you have used the Couple Counseling Guide with:

Youth Groups	
Community Groups	
Groups of Men only	
Mixed groups of men and women	
Church/ Mosque Groups	
Church/Mosque Leaders	
Students	
Counseling clients	
Other	

2. What impact do you think the Couple Counseling Guide activities are having on the attitudes and behavior of participants?

3. What have participants said or done to make you think this way?

4. When using, what activities worked well?

5. What activities did not work well and why?

6. What difficulties did you have in using Couple Counseling Guide?

7. Did you have to make any changes or adaptations? Please tell us about these adaptations.

8. What changes/additions would you suggest to make the Guide better, i.e. easier to use and understand?

9. Do you or your Faith Based Organization require further training or support around using the Couple Counseling Guide?

YES NO

10. If yes, what type of training do you suggest, and for whom?

11. Who should benefit from this training activity?

12. Any other comments?

Your Name: _____

FBO: _____

Address: _____

Telephone: _____

Fax: _____

E-mail: _____

Thank you!



Summary of the book

ANNEX 1: HOW IS HIV TRANSMITTED?

HIV Transmission

HIV can be transmitted from an infected person to another through:

- Blood (including menstrual blood)
- Semen
- Vaginal secretions
- Breast milk

Blood contains the highest concentration of the virus, followed by semen, then vaginal fluids, then by breast milk.

Activities that allow HIV transmission:

- Unprotected sexual contact with a person who is HIV positive
- Direct blood contact, including injection drug needles, blood transfusions, accidents in health care settings or certain blood products
- Mother to baby (before or during birth, or through breast milk)

Sexual intercourse (vaginal and anal): In the genitals and the rectum, HIV may infect the mucous membranes directly or enter through cuts and sores caused during intercourse (many of which would be unnoticed). Unprotected vaginal and anal intercourse is a high-risk practice.

Mother to child: It is possible for an HIV infected mother to pass the virus directly to her baby before or during birth, or through breast milk. Breast milk contains HIV, and while small amounts of breast milk do not pose significant threat of infection to adults, it is a viable means of transmission to infants.

The following “bodily fluids” are NOT infectious

- Saliva
- Tears
- Sweat
- Feces
- Urine

ANNEX 2: MULTIPLE AND CONCURRENT SEXUAL RELATIONSHIPS

The term Multiple Concurrent Partnerships (MCP) can be defined as a situation where partnerships overlap in time, either where two or more partnerships continue over the same period of time or where one partnership begins before the other one is terminated. When someone engages in MCP they are said to be part of a sexual network. This network involves not only their partners, but their partners partners and so on. It involves people who may or may not know each other but are connected physically through sexual behavior. If someone is only having sex with one partner – their spouse for example – but this partner has other partners, then they too are part of the sexual network, even though they may not know it.

The role of concurrent sexual partnerships is increasingly recognized as important for the transmission of sexually transmitted infections, particularly of heterosexual HIV transmission in Africa. Concurrent partnerships can increase the size of an HIV epidemic, the speed at which it infects a population, and its persistence within a population. One person can infect several people through the sexual network, who then go on to infect others causing the infection to spread very quickly. The chances of HIV spreading are great because of large sexual networks. People are most infectious in the first weeks and months of HIV infection, but they often do not know they are infected and may not take actions to protect their partners.

ANNEX 3: DISCORDANCE AND HOW IT COMES ABOUT

Sero-discordant is the term commonly used to describe a couple in which one partner is HIV positive and the other is HIV negative i.e. Partners having different sero-statuses.

Heterosexual intercourse is said to be the number one means through which HIV is spread. HIV transmission only takes place under certain conditions. As such it is very possible for couples after being together for many years to have different HIV test results. This is because HIV is not transmitted every time an HIV positive person has sex with an HI -negative person. Just like when you may or may not get sick after being around someone with flu.

The conditions under which one may get infected include:

The amount of virus in the positive person

- A person is more likely to infect their partner in the early days of infection when the body has not recognized the HIV presence. HIV takes this chance to multiply and in a day, it can make millions of copies of itself. The more virus there is, the more the person is likely to infect someone else. People are most likely to transmit HIV even before many screening tests can detect the virus. This explains on reason why the HIV epidemic moves so quickly.
- Close to half of new infections are transmitted by people who are in the early stages of infection. UNAIDS reports that 75% of new infections occur in stable relationships and marriage. Therefore, in circumstances where a person cheats on the partner and acquires HIV, chances are they will infect the partner during this early stage.
- After three months, the body recognizes the invasion and reacts by producing antibodies to fight HIV. These reduce the amount of virus in the body but cannot eliminate it. When a person's immunity is strong, the virus is reduced to an amount too low to infect another sexual partner.
- If a person who is HIV positive and at a stage where the infection is under control (with small amounts of viral copies) marries an HIV negative partner, the chances of passing on the virus are relatively low.

The use of antiretroviral drugs

- With time, HIV overwhelms the body's defenses causing the level of virus in the body to increase. When this happens, the body needs help in fighting the virus and the person starts taking antiretroviral therapy, or ART. This treatment helps bring down the amount of virus in the body. It also makes the person less likely to transmit HIV.
- ART decreases the potential for transmission of HIV, according to studies. As such discordance may also occur when the partner who is HIV positive is on effective Anti Retroviral Therapy (ART). This does not mean that a person on Anti retroviral drugs cannot infect her/his partner, but it is less likely.

A couple may not stay discordant forever. As long as they have unprotected sex, the other partner is at risk of getting HIV. That is why it is important to always have protected sex and use condoms if one partner is HIV positive and the other HIV negative.

Discordance and infidelity

- Using an HIV positive test in a discordant situation to conclude that your partner has cheated on you has no scientific basis. As discussed above, the positive partner might have become positive through other means and not only through infidelity. Or the partner may have been HIV positive before entering the marriage but not have been aware of their HIV status. People who love and respect each other can stay in a discordant relationship.
- It is, therefore, important to take an HIV test before marriage and a confirmatory test after three months to ascertain the status of both partners at the beginning of marriage. This will help to make them make the right decisions about their health. Couples should also know that in marriage, partners may not contract HIV at the same time. Therefore, your partners' HIV status does not confirm your status. Therefore it is important for both partners to get tested. HIV testing remains important even when couples have stayed together for a long time.

Sex life for discordant couples

- HIV Discordant couples, like any other couples, have sexual needs that should be fulfilled. They have a right to enjoy their sexual life. However, care must be taken to ensure that the partner who has tested HIV negative should remain so.
- It is also important for couples to know that they may not stay discordant forever. As long as they have unprotected sex, the other partner can eventually get HIV.
- The important thing for the discordant couples is that they should always have protected sex using male or female condoms.
- HIV discordant partners should seek medical guidance on their sexual life and how the two can live together without further transmitting the infection.
- Someone who is HIV positive can also get newly infected with a different strain of the virus if they have unprotected sex. This new strain may not respond to the combination of ARVs the person is currently taking. This means the viral load – or amount of virus -from the new infection may spread rapidly through their body. If they have unprotected sex with their spouse who is not infected, there is a high risk of them transmitting the new strain of the virus.
- It is very important that both partners openly discuss their responsibility of protecting one another, but also satisfying one another sexually.
- Both partners should still remain faithful to one another and avoid having unprotected sex in other sexual relationships.
- Other behaviors such as excessive use of alcohol and other drugs that impair one's logical thinking should be avoided for fear of engaging into unprotected sex even with your partner.

Discordance and child-bearing

Conception can occur even when a couple is HIV discordant if the couple engages in unprotected sex. HIV discordant couples who intend to have a child should seek counseling and guidance from a health facility to reduce the risk of transmitting HIV to the child and time the pregnancy when the mother, if she is HIV positive, is in strong health.

Challenges for discordant couples

Discordant results are often the hardest to accept among couples. It is also difficult for health workers to explain, yet it is common. There is need also to better understand what HIV discordance is, and how couples can deal with it in their relationship. When HIV testing reveals discordance, it is important for couples to remain together and to continue seeking counseling services on how they can happily live without infecting the negative partner.

Accepting and understanding HIV discordance helps couples and the general community to devise coping strategies such as health living and support groups. Discordant couples need to be empowered to prevent infecting the uninfected partner. If the couple continues to have unprotected sex, the HIV-negative partner is at a very high risk of infection.

HIV discordance can be challenging for the concerned partners and their families. There is a risk of being stigmatized and left unsupported. This is because many people associate having HIV with infidelity. Divorce is one other challenge that couples face with HIV discordant result. This occurs mainly when it is a woman who has an HIV positive result. Discordant couples need to be supported to better understand discordancy and continue to have a loving fulfilling life and marriage.

Discordance and supporting each other

There is need for HIV discordant partners to support and protect each other so as to live positively together. They need to be strong in supporting each other and avoid being influenced by others such as family or community members who may bring in some elements of stigma.

- Upon discovering this situation through HIV counseling and testing, the couple needs to seek counseling on how to cope with HIV discordance. They can also access free condoms at the testing site and health clinics.
- When making a decision to start a family, effective support can only be acquired from medical practitioners who can provide factual medical information on the options available and the possible risks of transmitting HIV to the other partner and the child.
- Regarding HIV testing and re-testing, discordant couples should seek these services together at a health facility.

Important point to note

The important thing is that HIV can be transmitted to the uninfected partner at any time.

Experts advise the HIV positive partner in discordant couples to adhere to treatment, and the couple to always use a condom whenever they have sex and should seek a doctor's advice if they want to have a child.

ANNEX 4: HIV AND PREGNANCY

The advent of HIV medications and the acceptance by physicians that HIV positive women can get pregnant, carry the baby to term, and not pass HIV to the newborn has given women renewed hope of family and motherhood.. However, HIV and pregnancy together is not without risk. But if women are aware of these risks and work closely with their doctors, there is no reason HIV should prevent them from becoming a mother.

Mother to child transmission

Mother-to-Child Transmission (MTCT) is when an HIV-infected woman passes the virus to her baby. This can occur during pregnancy, labor and delivery, or breastfeeding. Without treatment, around 15-30 percent of babies born to HIV-infected women will become infected with HIV during pregnancy and delivery. A further 5-20 percent will become infected through breastfeeding.

How Does HIV Infect the Baby?

- **Sharing a blood supply during pregnancy**
HIV can pass from mother to unborn baby while growing inside the womb. Mom's HIV positive blood also circulates in the unborn child, exposing the fetus to HIV in the process.
- **Infection during delivery** - During delivery, the newborn baby is exposed to large amounts of the mom's infected bodily fluids. Transmission can occur if the exposure is prolonged. During the birth process, both the mother and baby have cuts. The baby has a cut on the umbilical cord and is covered in the mother's blood from the birth canal. The open umbilical cord, if not well protected, becomes a passage for HIV from mother's blood.
- **During breastfeeding** - HIV can pass from mother to baby by way of breastfeeding. Mother's milk has very high concentrations of HIV, and without precautions, the risk of HIV infection during breastfeeding is around one in four. The baby may get HIV when breastfeeding through any opening that may be on the mother's nipples.

Effective Prevention of Mother-to-Child Transmission (PMTCT)

There are many ways to prevent mother to child transmission.

- **Preventing HIV infection among prospective parents:** Couples should avoid infection by remaining faithful to each other. They should also go for HIV testing to find out their status. If the couple is discordant, they should use condoms whenever they have sex. If they decide to have a child, they should seek guidance from a health care provider.
- **Avoiding unwanted pregnancies among HIV positive women** - women living with HIV should be provided with appropriate counseling and support to enable them to make informed decisions about their reproductive lives.

- **Getting proper antenatal care including HIV testing.** Pregnant women should seek proper care at the clinic and make sure they get an HIV test if they do not know their status. If they are positive, a health care provider can counsel them on how to avoid passing HIV on to their baby.
- **Preventing the transmission of HIV from HIV positive mothers to their infants during pregnancy, labor, delivery and breastfeeding.** WHO has introduced new guidelines for prevention of mother to child transmission. All pregnant women who are HIV positive are placed on treatment for life, regardless of their CD4 count. With this new protocol, mothers are encouraged to breastfeed their children for any length of time and not six months only as was the case with the first protocol.

During pregnancy-Using HIV medications – HIV positive pregnant women are encouraged to take their HIV medicines. Having a pregnant woman take a regimen containing Retroviral during her pregnancy and the delivery of her baby significantly decreases the risk of transmitting HIV to the baby.

- During delivery-Hospital deliveries are encouraged for HIV positive women. This helps the hospital to give the baby Nevirapine syrup after 24 hours
- During breastfeeding-counseling and advice on infant feeding for HIV-positive mothers has changed over time. In the old protocol, mothers were given a choice to either exclusively breastfeed for six months or exclusively formula feed

With the new protocol mothers are encouraged to breastfeed their children for any length of time.

ANNEX 5: LIFE SKILLS

Below are some of the life skills young couples need to have.

Good decision-making: In everyday life we often have to make decisions. Decision making is a process of choosing what to do by considering the possible consequences of different choices. We use our decision making skills to solve problems by selecting one course of action from several possible alternatives. The difficult part is to pick one solution where the positive outcome can outweigh possible losses. (Refer to the annex for steps to follow when making a decision).

It is important for couples to make their own decisions about their lives and relationship other than giving in easily to pressures. Young couples should not accept anything people are telling them, but should analyze it first and make a decision. Young couples need also to make decisions on what type of friends they would want to have. Bad company can lead people to do behaviors they are later sorry for, or it can ruin their reputation.

Assertiveness: Assertiveness is the ability to express yourself openly and honestly while also reflecting a genuine concern for others. It is about having the confidence to be yourself, to be true to your values and beliefs, and to be courageous enough to speak up when needed.

Acting assertively can increase your chances for honest relationships, help you to feel better about yourself, and give you a sense of control in everyday situations.

By developing an ability to express yourself, you may be able to reduce your stress, overcome pressures from within and outside your relationship. It can also help to increase your feelings of self-worth, improve your decision-making abilities, and feel more self-confident in relationships.

Many people struggle to develop assertiveness because they believe that they do not have the right to be assertive, lack the skills to express themselves effectively, or feel highly anxious or fearful about asserting themselves. They may also struggle due to social and cultural factors. These people give in easily to pressures that come in their relationships.

Good Interpersonal communication skills: Interpersonal skills are the life skills we use every day to communicate and interact with other people, individually and in groups. Interpersonal skills include not only how we communicate with others, but also our confidence, and our ability to listen and understand.

This skill can also be helpful when it comes to overcoming pressures.

Negotiation/refusal skills: Negotiation is something that we do all the time for example; we use it in our relationship perhaps for deciding a time to meet or where to go and have lunch together. NEGOTIATING involves being able to discuss and

reach a mutually satisfactory agreement. Negotiation can involve two people or several members from two parties. You can use negotiation in order to achieve what you want.

When faced with pressures from within or outside your relationship, you can use negotiation to come to a mutual agreement.

Goal setting: This can help you to give your life a sense of purpose and direction.

If you have goals in life, you work towards achieving those goals. You will not stop at anything until you have reached your goal.

Setting goals helps you to overcome the obstacles that prevent you from realizing your dreams. These obstacles may include peer pressures to do something bad.

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