

Marriage Meeting Program

All couples could benefit from giving a little attention to the topic of good communication. Even the healthiest couples rely heavily on this subject and executing its meaning on a daily basis. The Marriage Meeting Program is one way of achieving this goal. It is a self-help model towards building positive communication between couples in a relationship. The plan was created by Marcia Naomi Berger, LCSW and described in detail throughout her book, *Marriage Meetings for Lasting Love*. The model consists of four categories to discuss during each thirty to forty-five minute meeting: appreciation, chores, planning fun events, and dealing with a problem or challenge. She encourages the couple to keep the meeting at a strict time limit and schedule the meetings in advance so both parties are prepared and ready. Follow this four step plan each week and watch your marriage transform!

For the first and second steps the partners are to rotate who begins each section. One partner will begin with sharing reasons for appreciation. It will be important to use “I statements” and be specific about the compliments given. Share comments such as “I appreciate you watching our son while I went to the grocery store on Tuesday” or “I appreciate you making the delicious meal for us and our friends Friday night.” The other partner will express gratitude and take a turn. It can also be helpful to ask if you forgot anything to allow feedback from the other person before moving on. The second category in the discussion is in regards to chores. Try the partner who went second to go first this time. Be prepared with a “to-do list” and also be prepared to take notes on the ideas shared. This isn’t a time to accuse the other for what they haven’t done but to set priorities, timelines, and discuss important tasks for the household, family, and for each individual.

The next task returns to a fun topic of planning an enjoyable event. You can plan something fun for the family but taking the time to plan a pleasurable activity for you two as a couple is important also. Bring your calendars and exciting ideas you have thought of throughout the week. The final chapter of the meeting may be challenging but is an essential part in a relationship. As a couple, you will tackle a problem area you two have been facing. Initially, start off with an easy problem. Don’t jump into a hot topic relating to sex, in-laws, money, or parenting issues. These can be brought up once you have gotten the hang of the Marriage Meeting Program. Just bring up one issue for each meeting to discuss and avoid complaining. Reframing the complaint into a request with using “I statements” is a helpful way to avoid hostility and defensiveness. Try “I feel lonely and abandoned when you come home late” instead of “You are always coming home late and you don’t love me.” The second statement can trigger a defensive reaction verses actually listening to what you said and how you feel.

Beginning the Marriage Meeting Program with a professional present may be a useful approach in getting the communication started with your partner. The goal is not to stir up problems but to set a plan in motion for a way to enhance the relationship and communication between you and your partner. In order for the MMP to be effective you must be willing and present in the moment with your partner and ready for progress. If you are struggling with your emotions, thoughts, and beliefs, talk this over with a professional to help you come to a point where you are cognitively ready to take this step.

Berger, M. (2014) Marriage meeting program: A strength based program for a successful relationship. Seminar through NASW.