

PREPARE ENRICH

• *building strong marriages* •

Using the Couple and Family Maps

What are the Couple and Family Maps?

The Couple and Family Maps were derived from Dr. Olson's *Circumplex Model of Marital and Family System*. The Circumplex Model is one of the most popular and scientifically-tested models for understanding and treating couples and families. Over 1,000 research studies have been conducted using this model with results repeatedly demonstrating that closeness and flexibility are related to healthy and developmental outcomes for couples and families. The Couple and Family Maps in PREPARE/ENRICH are simplified versions of the Circumplex Model, however, their theoretical ideas are the same.

Why are the Couple and Family Maps part of PREPARE/ENRICH?

The Couple and Family Maps are powerful tools that provide couples a simple visual representation of how they each perceive their relationship on the dimensions of “closeness” and “flexibility”.

The Couple and Family Maps help couples understand the interconnectedness of family members by addressing past, present, and future dynamics. Family systems theory, for example, asserts that some interactional patterns are transmitted down generations. Deliberate attempts to examine family-of-origin patterns and to compare them with personal preferences, can help individuals and couples consider their own role in either accepting or rejecting patterns they have experienced in their past. The Couple and Family Maps are also very useful because they encourage proactive behavior by illustrating that relationships are not fixed in one place on the map. Couples can visually see the changes they've had from past to present family relationships and this enables them to plan where they would want to fit on their couple map in the future.

Key factors in understanding the Couple and Family Map:

- The Maps use two major dimensions (“closeness” and “flexibility”) to describe twenty-five (25) types of relationships. These are grouped into three basic categories: *balanced*, *mid-range*, and *unbalanced*.
 - The nine (9) *balanced* types exhibit balanced levels on both closeness and flexibility. This symmetry tends to be most functional for couples and families as it enables them to cope well with normative stressors. These couples and families balance their needs for separateness and togetherness while also maintaining a balance between stability and the capacity to adapt to change.
 - The twelve (12) *mid-range* types are typically balanced on one dimension (closeness or flexibility) but unbalanced on the other. These couples and families generally function well in a variety of circumstances, although stressful events and certain normative transitions (e.g., births or deaths) can cause them problems.
 - The four (4) *unbalanced* types are unbalanced in both closeness and flexibility. These couples and families are at the extremes or outer edges of the map. They typically have difficulty negotiating levels of intimacy that enable all family members to feel included and nurtured. They also struggle in their attempts to stay organized as a unit, and in their abilities to adapt to change.
- The Couple and Family Maps are “dynamic,” meaning the placement of a given couple or family on the map varies over time due to influences and events shaping their lives.
 - Factors affecting map movement can be normative family life transitions such as the birth of a child or retirement.
 - Map placement (and movement) can also be due to unexpected stressors or trauma such as a catastrophic illness of a family member.
- Although there is no absolute “best level” or placement for any relationship, couples and families generally function best if they are in the balanced or mid-range categories.
- Family-of-origin experiences are important in shaping subsequent relationship expectations. Individuals learn relationship patterns from their past and there are tendencies to bring these into relationships.

Using the Couple and Family Map during feedback sessions:

The PREPARE/ENRICH Couple's Workbook discusses how to use the Couple and Family Maps in the feedback process. Among the topics to cover are a description of terms like "closeness" and "flexibility", and how they apply to couples and families.

A key part of this session is to review where the couple placed on the Map and their respective family-of-origin placements*. Here is where a discussion of similarities and differences in the couple's description of their relationship can help each individuals gain insight into their own perceptions and their partners. Couples can also explore how their family-of-origin experiences affect their current interactions and expectations for their relationship. Even if multiple feedback sessions are not possible, it is vital to allocate some time in even a single session to explore the Couple and Family Maps. **Couples over the age of 55 will not receive a Family Map*

Helpful questions when discussing the Couple and Family Map:

- 1) How does each partner view the relationship? In what ways do they perceive it similarly, and in what ways do they see it differently?
- 2) Given where they currently are on the Couple Map, where would they like to see their relationship move? Why?
- 3) Where on the Family Map did each partner's family-of-origin experience show up? How did they compare to each other? In what ways were they similar or different?
- 4) Ask the couple to discuss how their respective family-of-origin experiences shape their current relationship. What do they want to keep from those experiences? What do they hope to avoid repeating?

*For more information on the Circumplex Model see

www.facesiv.com

Chapter Six in the Facilitator's Manual

Using the Couple and Family Maps
Copyright © 2014 PREPARE/ENRICH, Inc.