

Guide to Developing Your Marriage Ministry

*Marriage Ministry Models
Created by California Healthy Marriages Coalition*





Marriage Ministry Model: Communication Skills “Hub” Program Guide to Developing Your Marriage Ministry

Overview

Healthy marriages are the basis of healthy families, which are the basis of healthy congregations. More and more, pastors are realizing the value of skills-based Marriage Education programs to complement the spiritual messages they give to their members. They are discovering that couple communication skills training can make a powerful and positive difference in the lives of the people they serve.

To help in this regard, California Healthy Marriages Coalition (CHMC) proposes that churches and faith-based organizations institute a **3-Part Marriage Ministry** (Marriage Preparation, Marriage Enrichment, Help for Troubled Marriages) to help their members prepare for and create dynamic, healthy, loving and lasting marriages. **Below is a Sample Model** built around a well-respected Communication Skills Training (CST) program as the core curriculum.

Marriage Preparation

This ministry is designed for couples who are formally engaged or seriously considering marriage, and includes:

- **Pre-Marital Inventory (PMI)** – each member of the couple answers a questionnaire which then reveals their personal profile on a range of marriage-related topics. Each person’s answers are compared to discover their areas of agreement and where they differ. The inventory then serves as an excellent basis upon which to have skilled discussion on these important topics.
- **8-12 hour CST Program** – the couple learns and practices the core communication skills of the particular Communication Skills Training (CST) curriculum which is offered.
- **Mentor Couple** – the couple has 3 or 4 two-hour sessions prior to the wedding with a mentor couple trained in PMI and the CST, then follow-up sessions with the mentor couple at various times throughout the first year.
- **Marriage Enrichment** – the couple commits to at least 12 hours per year of additional Marriage Education.

Marriage Enrichment

This ministry provides couple communication skills education to boost and strengthen the relationships of the couples who are already married, and includes:

- **Full 12-16 hour CST Program** – learning (or reviewing in-depth) the core communication skills of the particular Communication Skills Training (CST) curriculum which is offered.
- **Add a New Marriage Education Program** – each year to broaden, deepen, and further enrich the marriage, making ongoing Marriage Education a regular part of their married life.

Help for Troubled Marriages

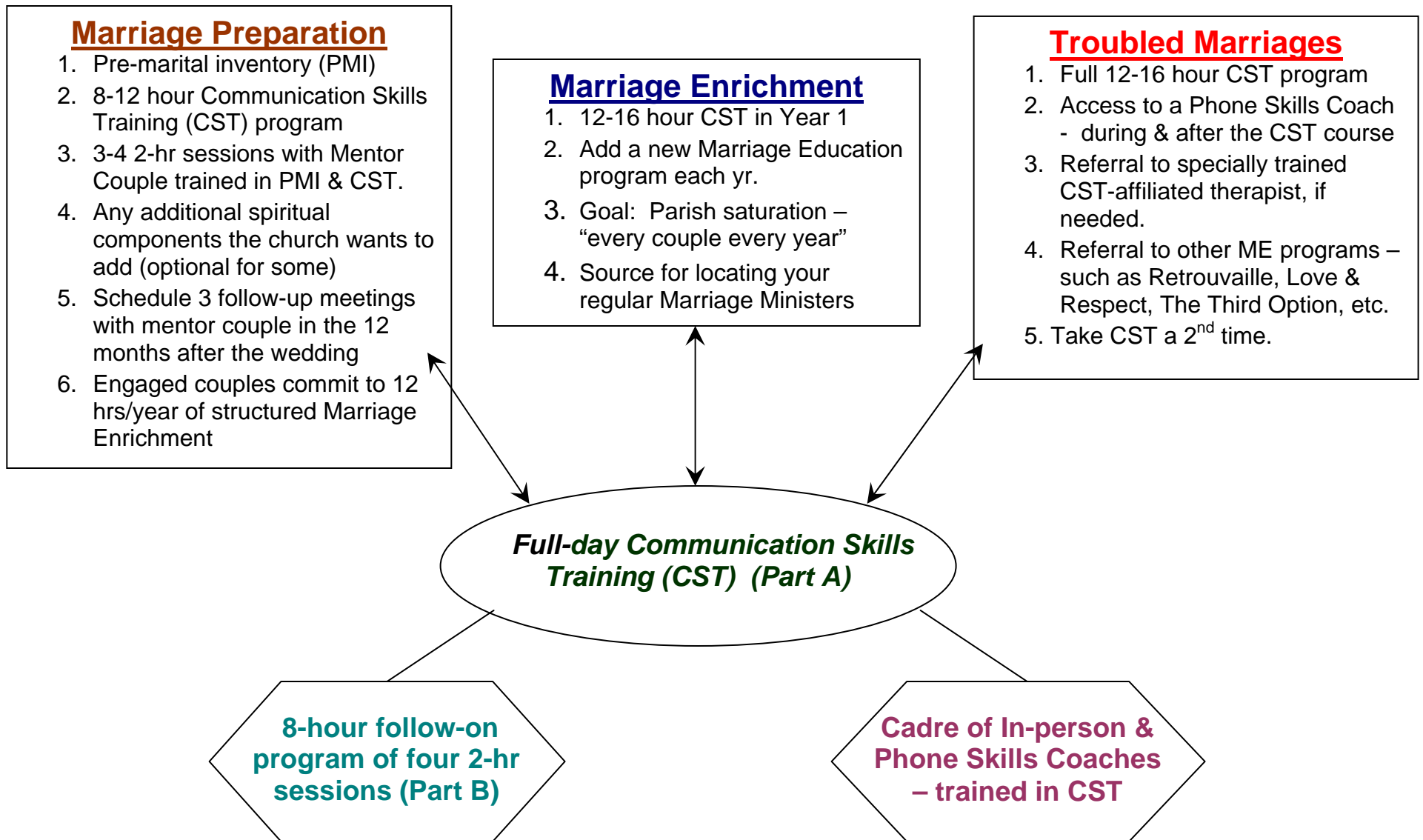
This ministry is designed to help couples with difficult or troubled marriages to break through their impasses, barriers and the hurts that have wounded them and their relationship, and with the help of a mentor couple, go onto the journey of rebuilding and strengthening their marriage:

- **Full 12-16 hour CST Program** – learning (or reviewing in-depth) the core communication skills of the particular Communication Skills Training (CST) curriculum which is offered.
- **Access to a CST Skills Practice Phone Coach** – during and after the CST course. This skills coaching will help the couple “stay in skill” as they discuss issues of concern in their everyday lives and help them develop the capacity to have skilled and successful conversations on their own.
- **Referral to a CST-Affiliated Licensed Therapist** – if needed.
- **Referral to other Marriage Education Programs** – that are most effective in dealing with particular couple issues and problems.
- **Full CST Program again** – it may be very helpful for these couples to review the CST class at least one more time during the year.

The Benefits

CHMC believes that a 3-Part Marriage Ministry will help provide a “full service” approach to couples in the church: helping engaged couples learn the skills to start their marriages off right, helping already married couples take their relationship to a whole new level, and helping troubled marriages find hope and a new beginning in their relationship. With such dynamic Marriage Ministries, couples will not only survive but thrive! **(See Chart on the Back of This Page of a Sample Communication Skills Training-Based Model for Marriage Ministry).**

A Sample Communication Skills Training-Based Model for Marriage Ministry





Starting With a Launch Program Guide to Developing Your Marriage Ministry

Overview

The California Healthy Marriages Coalition (CHMC) believes that robust Marriage Ministries provide at least three core program types: **Marriage Preparation, Marriage Enrichment, and Help for Troubled Marriages**. We believe that married couples should participate in **at least one structured Marriage Enrichment program a year**. Resources for Pre-Marriage couples and Troubled Marriages should be available at any time couples need them. Churches may also provide additional programs to teach Relationship Skills to youth, singles, expectant couples, and step-families.

Choosing a Launch Program

An ideal way to launch your Marriage Ministry is by using a fun, easy-to-implement Marriage Enrichment program with wide appeal to many couples. This will provide an opportunity to get your church excited about enriching marriages and recruit volunteers to lead and assist in future programs across the three program types. (You will find a sample timeline for how to do this on the reverse side of this guide.)

Some **good curricula to start with** are: 10 Great Dates, Laugh Your Way to a Better Marriage, The Marriage Course and Love and Respect. These are DVD-based programs that are very popular and easy to lead.

Providing Other Programs and Curricula

As you plan your Marriage Ministry, think about what programs and curricula you will provide for the three core program types that are essential to a Marriage Ministry. You will find Marriage Education curricula for each program type that are recommended by CHMC on the attached list. There are also many other faith-based and non-faith-based programs available. You can find descriptions for many of these other programs on www.smartmarriages.com under "Directory".

Marriage Preparation: _____

Marriage Enrichment: _____

Help for Troubled Marriages: _____

Your programs for couples Preparing for Marriage and couples in Troubled Marriages may remain constant; however, you will want to provide a variety of Marriage Enrichment programs each year for married couples in your church.

Some Marriage Education programs require instructors to go through a training process in order to be certified to teach the class. Many of these trainings are available through CHMC. You can find information about upcoming facilitator trainings throughout California at www.CaMarriage.com. Additionally, the annual Smart Marriages Conference also provides many facilitator training opportunities. Find information about the conference at www.smartmarriages.com.

Suggested Timeline for Launch Program

This timeline illustrates a potential plan for recruiting course facilitators and Marriage Ministry volunteers for your first Marriage Education program:

- Before Program Starts: Recruit as many couples as possible in all stages of marriage-- from seriously dating/engaged, to newlywed, to parenting, to married for 50+ years—to participate in the program.
- First Session: Pastor or key church couple/leader enthusiastically welcomes participants and introduces the Marriage Education (ME) facilitator (if he or she is not the facilitator). He/she announces that this program is just the beginning of an exciting Marriage Ministry in which other opportunities like this will be offered down the road. (We strongly encourage the pastor and spouse to attend and participate in the initial ME program as an example to other couples.)
- Halfway Through the Program: Pastor or key church couple/leader visits the class again to see how couples are enjoying and benefiting from the Marriage Education program. He/she mentions again that other marriage enrichment opportunities like this will be coming up soon and encourages couples to be involved at any level they want to participate.
- Third to Last Session: Pastor or key church couple/leader announces more detailed information about other upcoming Marriage Ministries that the church plans to start and says that at the last two sessions a volunteer sign-up sheet will be passed around. Different volunteer roles may include: teaching a course, becoming a mentor couple, becoming a class skills coach and/or phone coach, providing logistical assistance, babysitting, providing snacks, etc. He/she encourages participants to think and pray about their potential role in helping the church's Marriage Ministry in the meantime.
- Second to Last and Last Sessions: Facilitator passes around volunteer sign-up sheets for those interested in helping at future programs, with space for volunteers to indicate their interests.
- After Launch Program Ends: Pastor/leader contacts volunteers and structures additional programs accordingly. Future ME leaders are trained in ME programs planned for the Marriage Ministry.

****Note:** Pastor/leader and Marriage Education facilitator may also take note of high functioning couples before and during the Marriage Education program and approach them separately to discuss the possibility of becoming leaders of Marriage Education programs.