INFORMATION SHEET

Title: Couple relationship education program evaluation (Couple Study)
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Background

Most adults choose to be in a committed relationship with a life partner, and value this relationship very highly. The goal of our research is to help couples in currently satisfying relationships to strengthen their relationship, and maintain high relationship satisfaction. Our long-term goal is to develop better ways to help couples have a mutually satisfying long-term relationship – the sort of relationship they choose to stay in.

Aims of the Research

In this research we want to determine the effectiveness of three different approaches to couple relationship education. We are comparing: (a) self-directed reading; (b) an internet-based relationship assessment with feedback program called RELATE; and (c) RELATE with Couple CARE (Couple CARE is a self-directed relationship education program providing the opportunity to develop key relationship knowledge and skills at home).

What Participation Involves

If you agree to participate you will first complete a relationship assessment. This assessment consists of a telephone interview, a skype recording of a conversation between the two of you, and each of you completing a questionnaire known as RELATE over the internet. Please note that all telephone conversations with therapists will be recorded, to ensure that we are providing a high quality service to our participants, and for possible use when training future therapists. You will each take part in a phone interview, in which you will be asked about your relationship history and your goals in undertaking a relationship education program. You also will be asked to talk to each other about an issue in your relationship, and that conversation will be recorded with skype recorder.

You will then be sent a link to a website, where you will individually complete a 10-minute decision-making task at a time that suits you. Decision-making skills are important in couple relationships, and this task will further investigate the role of decision-making in close relationships. Upon completion you will be rewarded with up to $15 (per person) according to your performance on this task. Once completed you will be directed to the RELATE questionnaire, which takes about 50-60 minutes. The RELATE questionnaire asks questions about your family-of-origin (your parents or whoever you grew up with), your preferences and beliefs about couple relationships and your current relationship.

Couples will be randomly assigned to one of three conditions. Each condition involves a different type of relationship education: (a) self-directed reading, (2) RELATE, or (3) RELATE with Couple CARE. In the self-directed reading condition couples receive a book filled with information about improving committed romantic relationships. This book has been written by a member of our research team (Professor Jeffry Larson), and has been highly valued by many couples. Couples read the book in their own time, discuss the ideas together and apply them as they see fit. Mid-way through the study couples in the book condition will receive a 30 minute phone call from their educator to discuss the ideas presented in the book.

Couples in the other two conditions receive a report based on their answers to the RELATE questionnaire. The report is computer-generated and presents information on your relationship strengths, as well as areas you might want to work on. All couples in the other two conditions discuss the results of their RELATE assessment in a single telephone call of about 60 minutes’ duration with a trained relationship educator. The call is intended to help clarify the strengths and areas of challenge in the relationship, and help each partner develop ideas about how to further strengthen the relationship. Couples in the RELATE condition then work together in their own time to apply the ideas and try to achieve the relationship enhancement goals they have worked out for themselves. RELATE condition couples will receive one 30 minute phone call mid-way through the study to assess how they are going with implementing their chosen relationship goals. The RELATE condition takes about 2.5 hours in the first week: One hour to complete the RELATE assessment, half an hour to read the...
report and another hour on the telephone to review the report. After that couples work as much as they choose to in their own time to implement the ideas gained in the review.

The third condition is RELATE with Couple CARE. After couples in this condition complete RELATE and discuss their report, they undertake a six-unit relationship education program called Couple CARE. Couple CARE consists of a DVD, a guidebook, and a series of telephone calls with a trained relationship educator. Couples complete Couple CARE at home, in their own time. In each unit, couples watch a section of the DVD together, which describes key ideas and shows important skills. Couples then complete some structured exercises presented in the guidebook to help them apply the ideas to their own relationship. The telephone calls are each about 40 minutes long, review each couple’s progress, and help them to work effectively on their relationship. The program works best if couples complete one unit per week. This condition takes about 2.5 hours in the first week, to complete the RELATE assessment and read and review the report. Over the next 6 weeks it takes about 2 hours per week: 15 minutes to watch the DVD segment, 50 minutes to complete the guidebook exercises and about 40 minutes for the telephone call.

About eight weeks after commencing and once you complete your assigned program, all couples complete another assessment. This involves participating in a telephone interview to discuss your impressions of the program you completed, and review what you think you have gained from participation. You also will be asked to have another conversation with your partner and record it. Finally, you will complete a shorter version of RELATE, which you can do over the Internet. Six, twelve, and eighteen months later we will ask you to again complete a brief version of RELATE to see how the two of you are doing individually and as a couple.

**All programs and resources used in this project are offered to participating couples free of charge. Couples are not paid for their participation in the project.**

**Risks**
There are no known risks of completing RELATE or Couple CARE. Previous experience has shown that almost all couples find similar programs highly beneficial, and fun to complete. In the event that the program is not suitable for you, or you feel the need for further assistance, please let us know and we will be happy to help you.

**Confidentiality**
All the information obtained in the project will be confidential. When you complete RELATE online you are given a special code to access the website, and you do not enter any identifying information on the website. Only a few members of the research team will have access to the information you provide on the website. The recordings you make of the conversation with your partner, and the notes the educator takes on your answers to the interview questions will be kept under secure lock and key in the School of Psychology at The University of Queensland. Neither your identity nor your answers to the questionnaires will be revealed to anyone outside the research team. The information gathered will be used to prepare scientific articles. We only use group – not individual – information.

**Information on the Research Results**
If you request it, at the end of the study you will receive a letter explaining the project’s key findings. No information on individuals is included in any research results.

**Consent to Participate**
Your participation is voluntary and you are under no obligation to take part. You may refuse to participate or withdraw from the project at any time and do not have to explain why.

**If You Have Concerns about This Research**
This study has been cleared by one of the human ethics committees of the University of Queensland, in accordance with the National Health and Medical Research Council’s guidelines. To discuss your participation in this study, or to find out more information, please contact either of the staff members listed below. If you would like to speak to an officer of the university who is not involved in these studies, please contact the Ethics Officer (3365 3924).

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