

# Marriage Education Increases Relationship Satisfaction

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## Introduction

Almost ninety percent of Americans will choose to marry at some point in their lives. Close to fifty percent of marriages in the United States end in divorce. Around half of all children will witness the dissolution of a parent's marriage. Of these children close to half will go on to witness a parent's second divorce. Children who are raised in single-parent homes are less likely to get married, and those who do marry are more likely to divorce. Teenage girls from single-parent homes are two times more likely than their peers from two-parent homes to drop out of high school and/or give birth to an out of wedlock child. These numbers reflect the breakdown of marriage and family in our society. This breakdown has substantially contributed to social conditions that threaten the foundation of American society, culture and potential for economic prosperity, including dramatic increases in delinquent and illegal behaviors that lead to juvenile and adult incarceration, illegal drug use, risky sexual activities, declining academic performance, physical and mental health concerns, increased poverty, and the squandered potential of children, our future generation.

Providing couples with tools to improve communication, bonding, and conflict resolution increases relationship satisfaction and ultimately can help sustain marriages. Participating in relationships skills programs, such as those offered by the PAIRS Foundation, gives couples the tools required to strengthen love relationships,

and endure times of stress and hardship. Research continues to demonstrate that PAIRS relationship skills training, a behavioral/cognitive educational approach developed, evaluated, and refined over a quarter century, has the potential to reverse this trend of relationship breakdown and significantly contribute to strengthening families and improving outcomes for society, and more importantly, for children.

For this study, PAIRS Foundation's instructors delivered the nine-hour PAIRS Essentials curriculum, including exercises to enhance communication, emotional understanding and expression, and constructive conflict resolution in both English and Spanish. In 2006 PAIRS Foundation was awarded a multi-year, multi-million dollar grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families to conduct a healthy marriage demonstration project in South Florida. As a result of the federal grant, couples in the classes studied for this research were able to participate at no cost.

## The PAIRS Approach

PAIRS (Practical Application of Intimate Relationship Skills) classes provide a comprehensive system to enhance self-knowledge and develop the ability to sustain pleasurable intimate relationships. PAIRS delivers a unique technology built on a skill based approach to enhancing empathy, bonding and emotional literacy. PAIRS curricula integrate a wide range of theories

and proprietary methods from psychology, education and psychotherapy and presents them in an educational format in classes that vary in length from nine to one hundred and twenty hours. PAIRS acts to bridge therapy, marital enrichment, and family development through a cost effective group educational approach to reducing family breakdown. This study evaluates the impact PAIRS Essentials (9-12 hours) (Eisenberg & Gordon, 2009) on relationship satisfaction.

### Methods

*Participants.* The sample for these analyses is drawn from 747 participants who enrolled in PAIRS relationship and marriage education classes in South Florida. The sample includes 43.5% male participants and 56.5% female participants. 14.9% of the participants were between the ages of 21-30, 51% of the participants were between the ages of 31-45, 28.5% of the participants were between the ages of 46-60, 4.8% of participants reported being 61 or older. The mean age of participants was 41. 15.8% of participants are African American, 14.2% are White (non Hispanic), 68.2% are Hispanic/Latino, 1.7% indicated “other” when asked their ethnic background. The mean years of participant education was 14. 83.4% of the participants reported their relationship status as married, 13.5% of the participants indicated they were engaged or considering marriage, and 3.1% indicated they were separated or considering separation. 60.1% of the sample has children under the age of 18. Couples reported a mean combined annual income of \$72,000.

*Measures* A demographic form was designed by the research team to gather applicable information about participants. Participants in the study were asked to indicate their race, age, sex, relationship status, employment status, number of years in current relationship, and income level.

Participants were also asked to complete the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS) prior to beginning the PAIRS class, and again six months after class completion. The DAS is a pencil and paper evaluation which contains 32 questions. The DAS can be divided into four subscales which measure Dyadic Cohesion (amount in which couples engage in similar activities), Dyadic Consensus (amount couples agree on important issues), Dyadic Satisfaction (satisfaction level currently in relationship) and Dyadic Affectional Expression (sexual and physical affection in relationship).

*Scoring* The DAS score range is derived from its four subscales Dyadic Satisfaction score range is from 0-65, Dyadic Consensus 0-50, Dyadic Cohesion 0-24, and Dyadic Affectional Expression 0-12. The total DAS score can range from 0-151. A score of >87-105 is considered atypical low; a score within the range is 106-124 is average; and 125-151 is atypical high.

### Results

Paired sample *t- tests* were conducted to determine significant changes from pre to post test scores for all participants and for the subset of participants who presented in the atypical low range on the Dyadic Adjustment Scale prior to participating in PAIRS Essentials nine hour curriculum.

Participants’ DAS total mean score prior to taking the PAIRS class was 106.06. Additionally pre test scores of the four DAS subscales were calculated; 35.26 for Dyadic Satisfaction, 48.05 Dyadic Consensus, 14.64 Dyadic Cohesion and 8.10 Dyadic Affectional Expression. Six months after completing the nine hour PAIRS Essentials curriculum, participants’ Dyadic Adjustment Scales were calculated. The DAS total score mean increased to 117.06. When we examine the research further to evaluate

mean subscale scores we again see consistent increases. Dyadic Satisfaction mean score increased to 38.85, Dyadic Consensus increased to 52.49, Dyadic Cohesion increased to 16.38, and Dyadic Affectional Expression increased to 9.34.(See Table 1)

DAS total and subscale mean scores were calculated for participants who fell within the atypical low range prior to completing the PAIRS Essentials nine hour curriculum. The DAS total mean score for participants within the subset prior to taking the PAIRS class was 86.98. Subscale mean scores for this population included; 29.02 Dyadic Satisfaction, 40.86 Dyadic Consensus, 10.91 Dyadic Cohesion and 6.19 Dyadic Affectional Expression. A six month follow

up revealed an increase in the DAS total mean score to 106.04. Similarly, subscale mean scores showed large improvements; Dyadic Satisfaction increased to 35.31, Dyadic Consensus increased to 47.97, Dyadic Cohesion increased to 14.59 and Dyadic Affectional Expression increased to 8.17. (See Table 2)

The mean DAS total score and subscale scores reported by participants prior to participation in PAIRS Essentials nine hour curriculum showed statistically significant increases when compared to six months follow up data. All effect sizes calculated fell within the moderate to large range (i.e., .20 - small, .50-moderate, .80- large; Cohen, 1977).

**TABLE 1. PAIRED SAMPLE T-TEST PAIRS PARTICIPANTS, N=747**

Outcome	Pre-Test		Post-Test		df	Paired-t	p<	Cohen's d Effect Size
	M	SD	M	SD				
DAS-Total Score	106.06	20.91	117.06	19.439	746	-17.277	.000	-0.545
Dyadic Consensus	48.05	9.1	52.49	8.919	746	-14.719	.000	-0.493
Dyadic Satisfaction	35.26	7.643	38.85	6.703	746	-14.797	.000	-0.500
Dyadic Cohesion	14.64	4.919	16.38	4.642	746	-9.092	.000	-0.364
Affectional Expression	8.1	2.739	9.34	2.484	746	-13.268	.000	-0.475

**TABLE 2. PAIRED SAMPLE T-TEST PAIRS PARTICIPANTS ATYPICAL LOW RANGE AT PRE-TEST, N=324**

Outcome	Pre-Test		Post-Test		df	Paired-t	p<	Cohen's d Effect Size
	M	SD	M	SD				
DAS-Total Score	86.98	15.079	106.04	21.816	323	-17.538	.000	-1.033
Dyadic Consensus	40.86	8.062	47.97	10.054	323	-13.348	.000	-0.785
Dyadic Satisfaction	29.02	6.42	35.31	7.398	323	-15.011	.000	-0.910
Dyadic Cohesion	10.91	3.97	14.59	5.053	323	-12.646	.000	-0.816
Affectional Expression	6.19	2.453	8.17	2.752	323	-12.500	.000	-0.761

## Qualitative Comments

*“It was really a pleasure to take this PAIRS course. The tools are fantastic and they really take you to a higher level in your relationship when you practice them.”*

*“I can use the skills taught in PAIRS in every aspect of my life. A new world has been opened up for me!”*

*“PAIRS provides a framework my wife and I can both agree upon to solve problems and communicate effectively.”*

*“We are the adoptive parents of two children and we had no idea how the challenges of parenting them would strain our marriage. We took this class so we could truly ‘celebrate’ our upcoming 20th anniversary and we cannot thank you enough for the tools you provided us with. We wish we had known them sooner!”*

*“I now have the tools that will help me to uncover my emotions and ask for what I need.”*

*“After taking the PAIRS class I realized how important it is to listen. I now realize that in the past few years I haven’t been listening to my husband. Since the class my marriage has greatly improved, thanks again!”*

## Discussion

The goal of this study was to investigate if the DAS scores of couples would be significantly different after completing a PAIRS Essentials nine hour course, which would indicate that PAIRS classes can increase relationship satisfaction and decrease relationship breakdown. The results show indications of positive changes among an ethnically and economically diverse population. This study demonstrates the lasting positive effects completing a PAIRS relationship education class have towards sustaining and improving relationship satisfaction. The results also

show that PAIRS classes can produce lasting significant improvements, especially for couples who report the lowest levels of relationship satisfaction. The results of this study are a promising indication of how relationship education classes can improve levels of satisfaction at any stage of relationship. These findings offer encouragement for continued work in the area of relationship education as a way of strengthening couple and marital satisfaction, which ultimately will assist in reducing divorce rates and the number of children raised in single-parent homes.