

“Your Love Life is Not Neutral.”

Marline Pearson



Scott M. Stanley, Ph.D.

University of Denver & PREP, Inc.

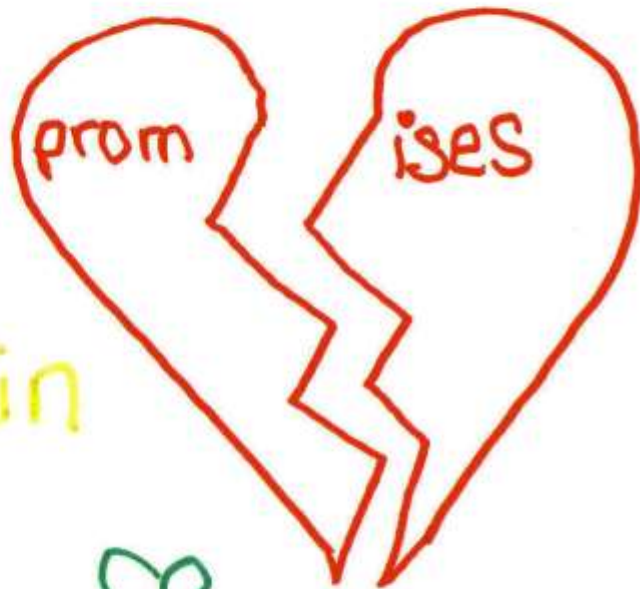
6-2-2014 CFSC

“Your Love Life is Not Neutral.”

Quoting my colleague
Marline Pearson

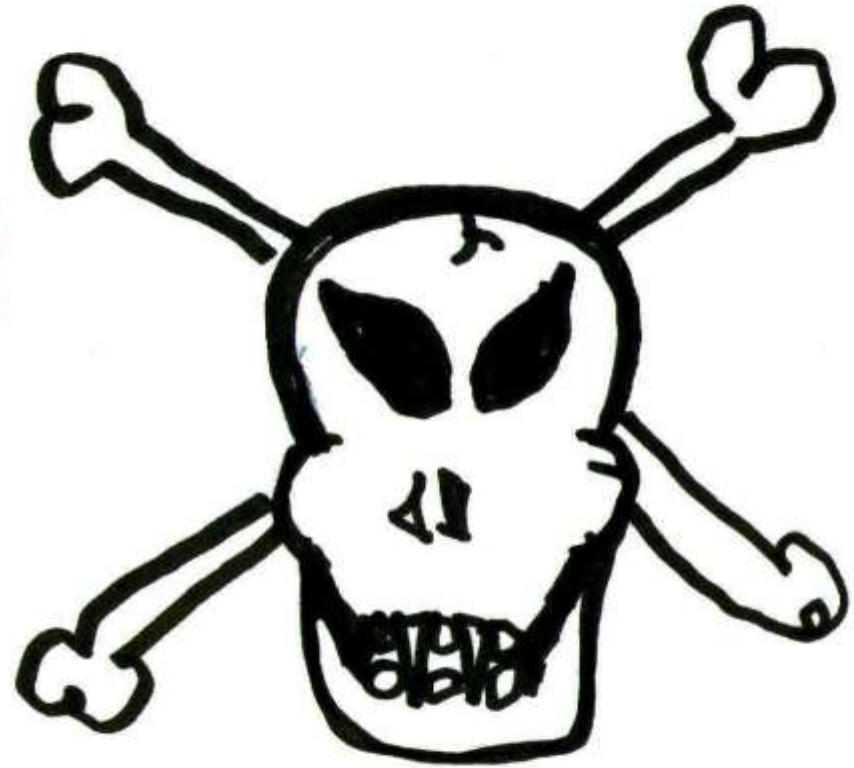
- Relationships today are like . . .

Relationships today are like...

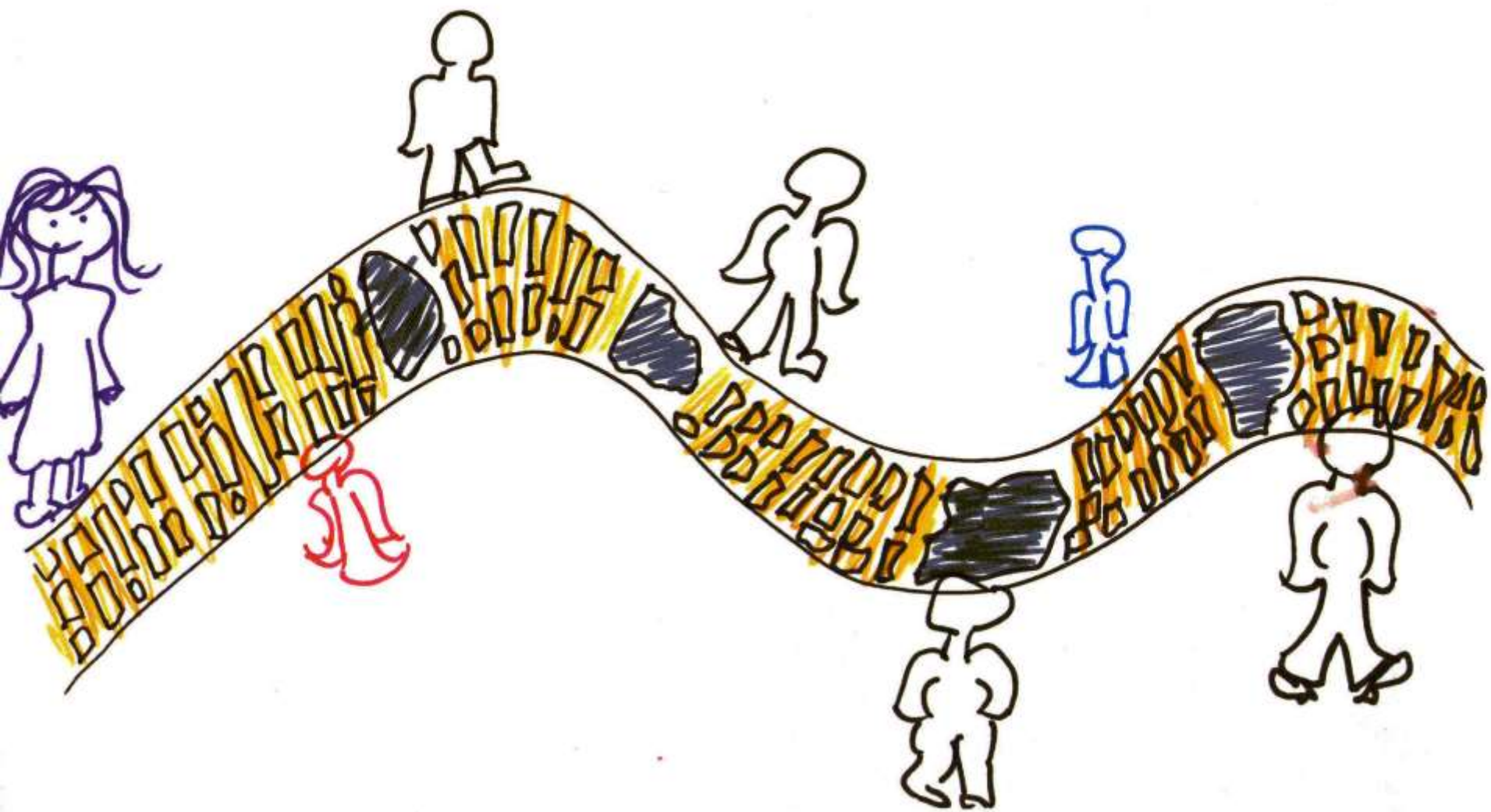


Men = Pain

Terror
You're Not Safe



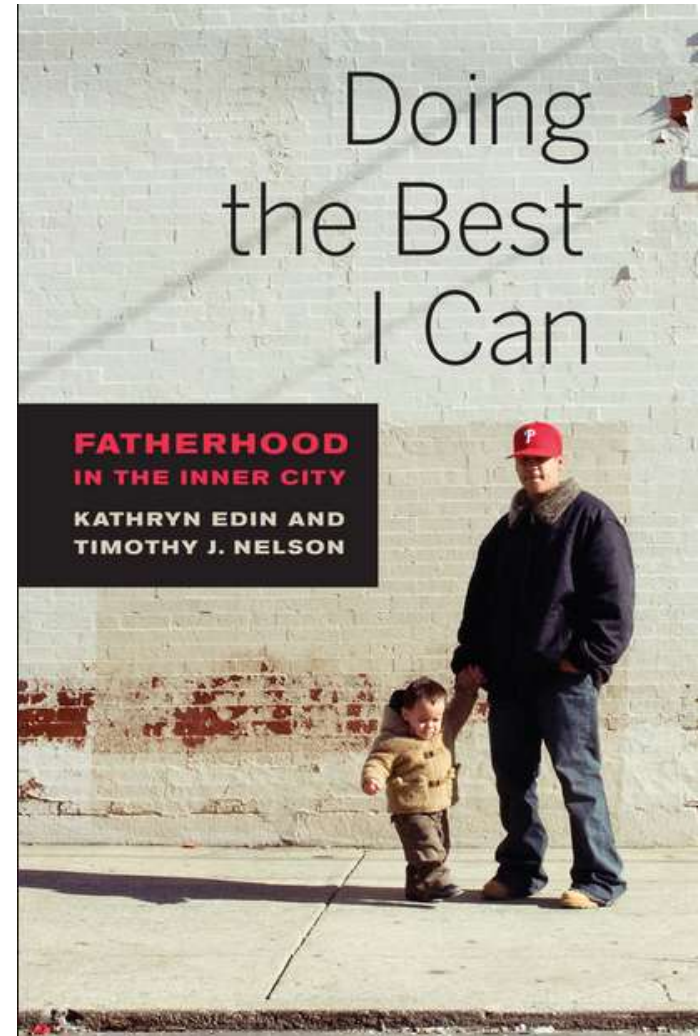
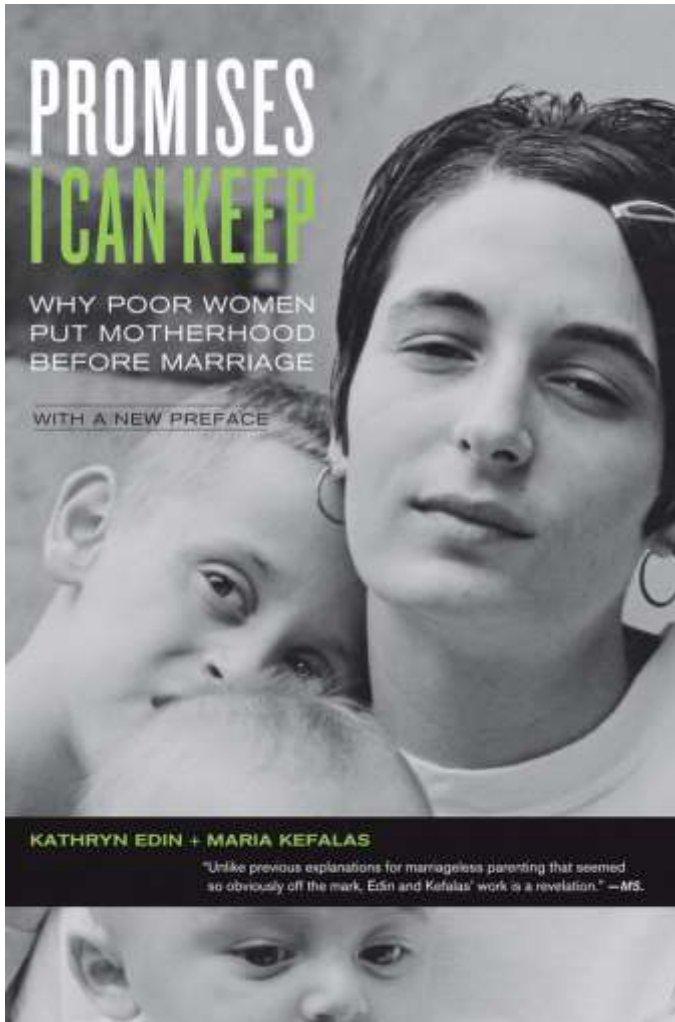
HURT



Let's Talk

- What are the primary goals of the work you do?
What are you trying to help make happen in the lives of clients?
- How does what people do in their “love lives” impact the lives of:
 - The adults?
 - Their children?

Kathy Edin's Advice



Impacts on Children

- Exposure to conflict and violence between adults in the home
- Exposure to increased risk for physical and sexual assault
- Exposure to relationship instability

The Context of Instability for Children

The “Perfect Storm” October 30, 1991



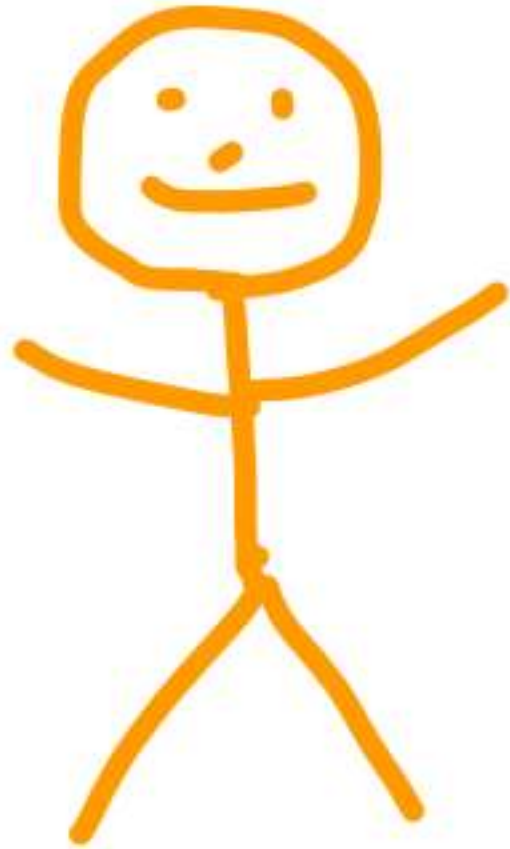
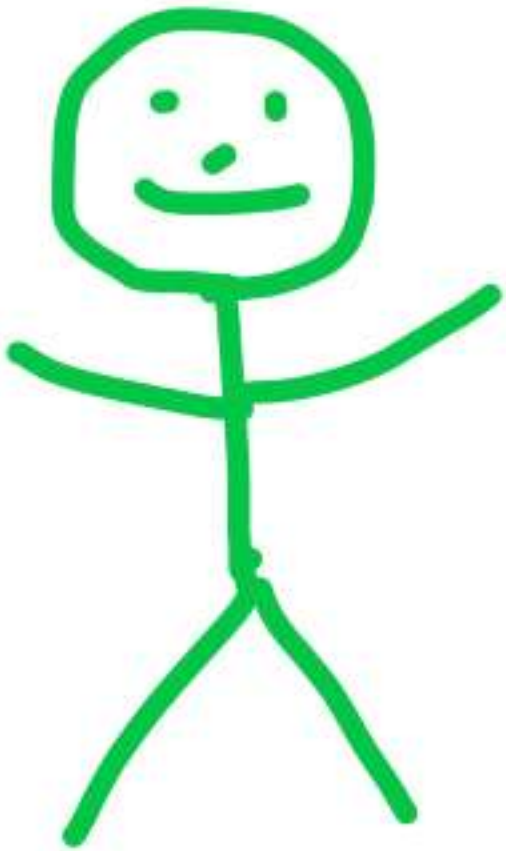
One Example

- Sara McLanahan (2011): on findings from the national Fragile Family Project:

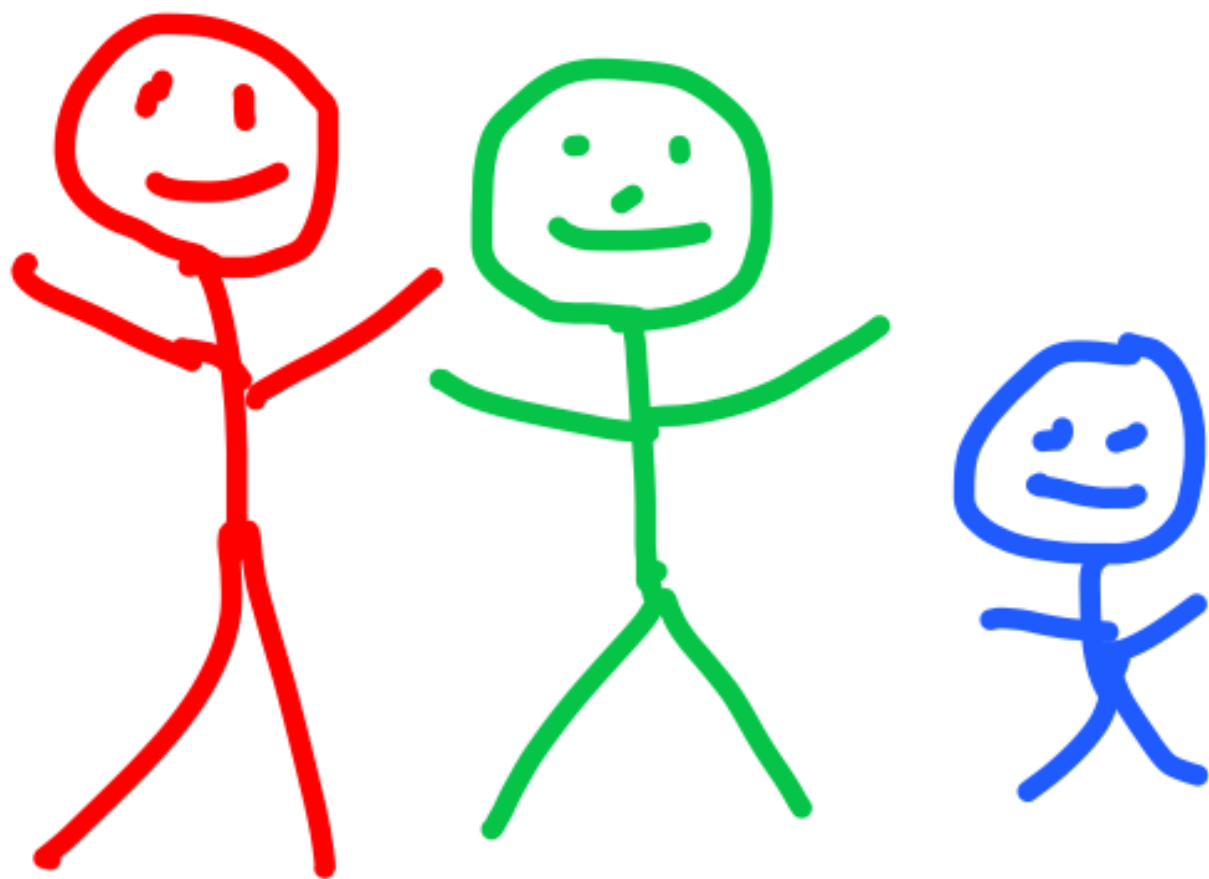
“Stability in the romantic lives of single mothers is very rare.”

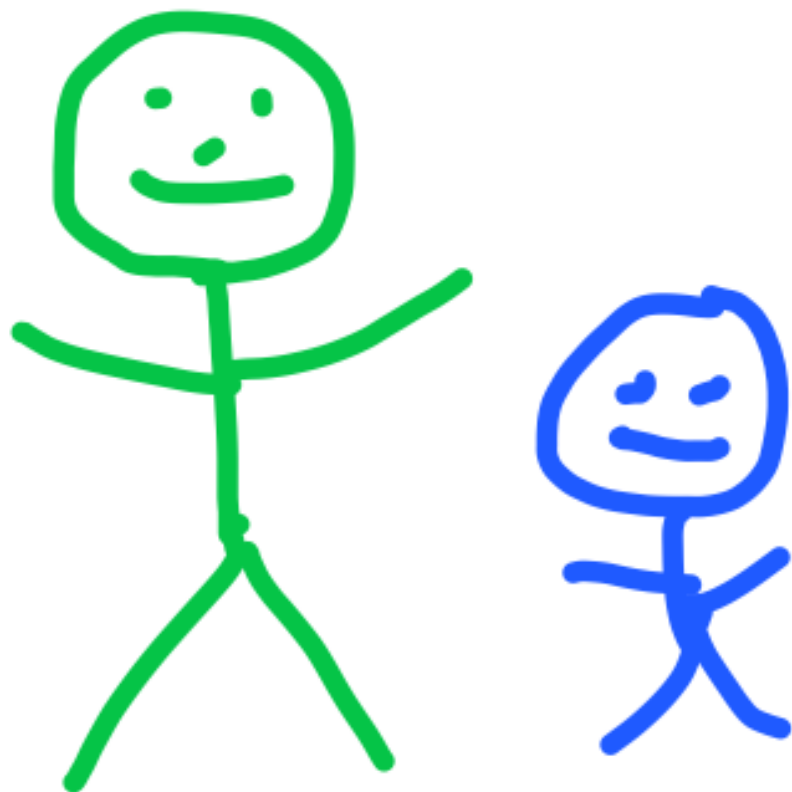
“... the average number of changes in dating partnership was nearly four times as high among unmarried mothers as compared with married mothers, 1.46 versus .35.”

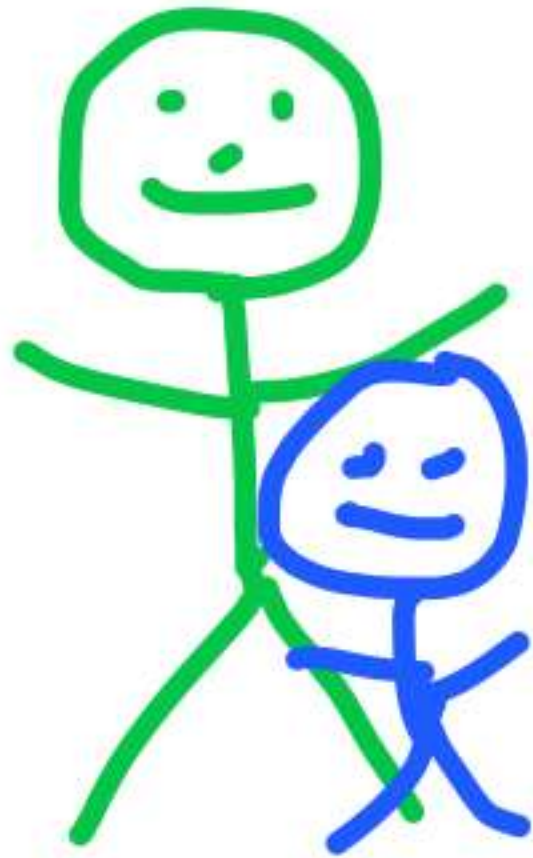
The Attachment-Disruption Cycle













The Perfect Storm

- Societal conditions are generating high numbers of people with:
 - insecurities about attachment and
 - low confidence about relationships and marriage . . .
- . . . at a time when we've been dismantling protective structures for developing relationships.

Relationship Education: One Part of an Overall Strategy

Relationship Education

- Not therapy or counseling
- Educational strategies
 - Strategies and skills
 - Knowledge
 - Goal to increase the odds of developing and securing healthy relationships

Efforts Under Welfare Reform Beginning in 1996

- TANF replaced Welfare in 1996
- Reinforcing the formation or stability of two parents families were fundamental goals.
- States could act on these goals but few did.
- ACF put out grants for Healthy Marriage Initiatives starting in 2002.
- Most efforts were (and have been) focused on couples.
- Almost all critiques have been focused on work with couples.

Types of Relationship Education

- Couple focused (examples)
 - Married couples
 - Premarital couples
 - Couples in transition to parenthood
- Individually focused (examples)
 - High school students
 - Single (or partnered) parents on TANF
 - Father involvement focused services

The Huge Unforeseen Opportunity

- Most of the discussions, plans, and arguments were conceptualized around the concept of relationship education for committed couples.
- The most exciting opportunities have opened up in areas of individually-focused, relationship education.

Individual Adult Focused RE

- The area of individually oriented relationship education is relatively new (Oklahoma led the way in innovations starting about 10 years ago).
- Examples of settings
 - TANF classes
 - Child Support Services
 - Correctional settings

Getting Specific

Type of Risk Factors in Relationships Change Based on Stage

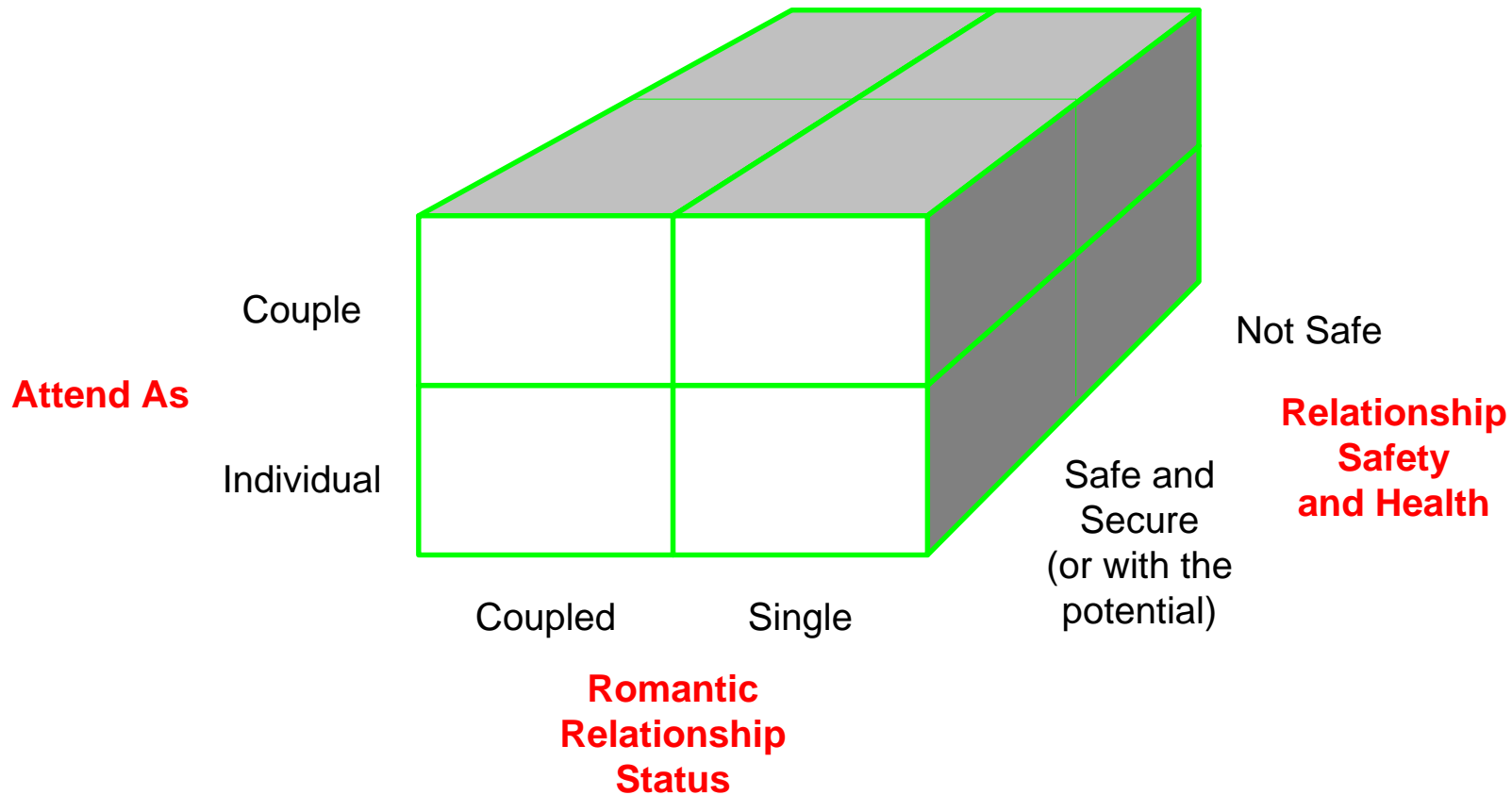
- Dynamic vs. Static Risk Factors
- With already existing couples, less is dynamic:
 - Communication
 - Commitment, investment, sacrifice
 - Expectations and tolerance
- With individuals not already partnered or not presently partners, much more is dynamic.

Conceptual Examples from Within My Reach TM

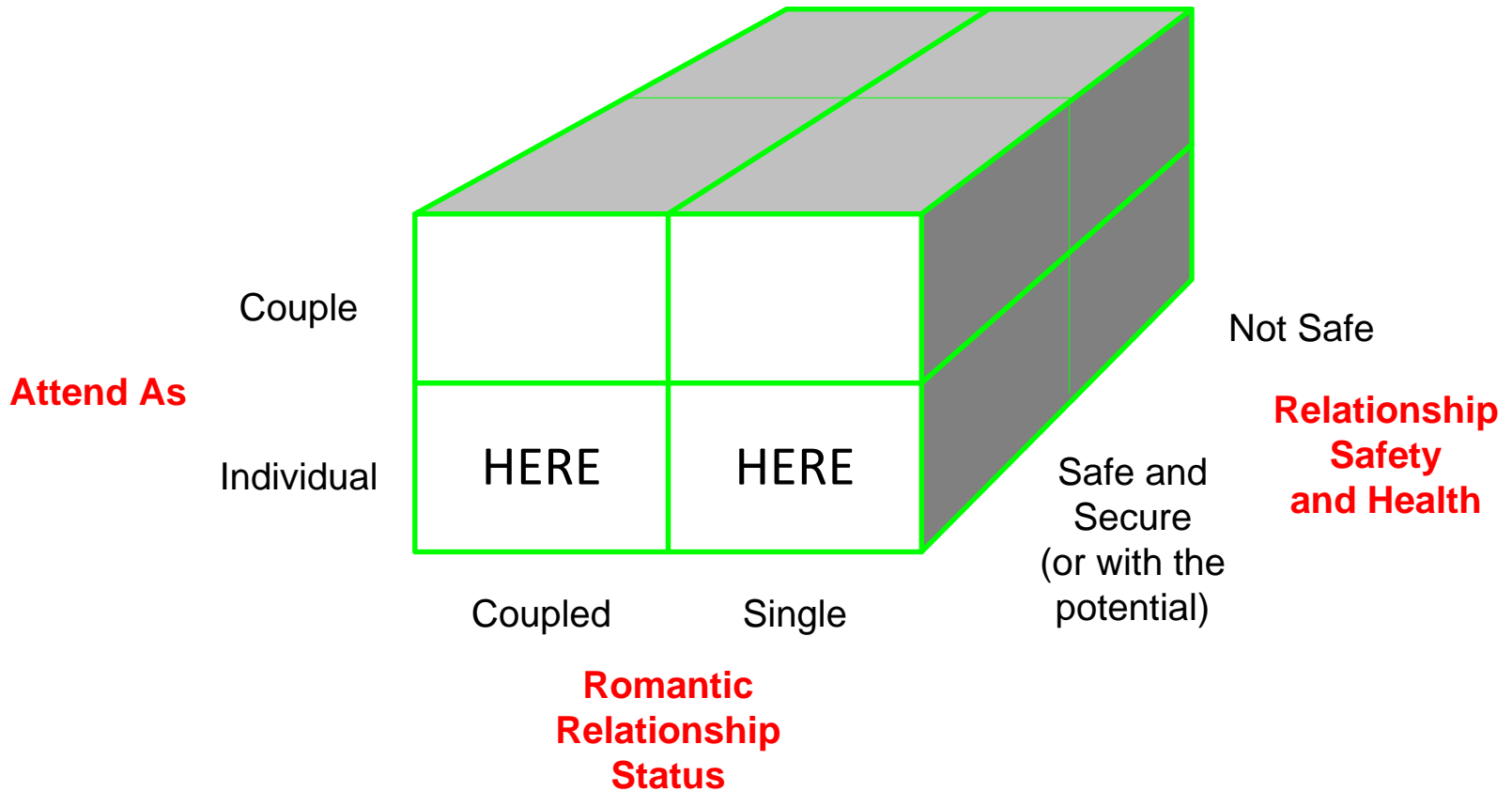
PREP's relationship skills and decision making program for helping *individuals* achieve their goals in relationships, family, and marriage

Marline Pearson, Scott Stanley, Galena Rhoades

- I will briefly describe work we have done with the curriculum *With My Reach* to give examples, and then go on to describe conceptual tools that anyone can use to help people they are working with to make healthy choices.



Within My Reach”



Overarching Goals

- (1) Helping those in viable relationships to cultivate, protect, and stabilize their unions, and to marry if desired
- (2) Helping those in damaging relationships to leave safely
- (3) Helping those desiring a romantic relationship to choose future partners wisely
- (4) Helping adults with children to be more aware of how their behavior effects their children
 - Behavior with ex-partner/co-parent
 - Behavior with new romantic partners

Major Content Categories of *Within My Reach*

Major Area One: Understanding Relationships, Risk and Choices

- What is your five and 10 year vision?
- Partner Choices
- Major risk dynamics: e.g.,
 - Safety
 - Sliding vs. deciding
- Knowing self,
 - values,
 - family of origin, personality
 - expectations, safety, and patterns of risk
 - healthy vs. unhealthy strategies

Major Area Two: Maintaining and Building Relationships

- Conflict dynamics
 - Damage to relationships
 - Effects on children
 - Domestic violence and safety
- Skills for talking without fighting
- Infidelity, trust, and responsibility
 - Cohabitation and boundary issues
 - Forgiveness vs. reconciliation
 - Playin vs. stayin



SIGNS OF GREATEST DANGER *in a Relationship*

- You are scared of your partner.
- You feel afraid in the relationship.
- Your partner tries to control you.
- Your partner keeps you from working or makes you dependent.
- Your partner interferes with you going back to school.
- Your partner tracks who you talk with.
- Your partner threatens to hurt you or your children.
- Your partner threatens to kill you or your children if you leave.
- Your partner is “hyper-jealous.”
- Your partner is hostile toward women (or men) in general.
- Your partner is abusive, then expresses remorse and sorrow, promises to change, but . . . no change happens.
- Your partner forces you to have sex or do things you are not comfortable doing.

Major Area Three: Moving Forward

- Commitment
 - Signals in a partner
 - Behaviors and willingness in self
- Marriage and children
 - Effects of multiple transitions on children
 - Barriers to marriage, if desired
 - Changes in self, partner, new partner?
- Taking a break from relationships
- Planning for the future

Individual Adult Focused RE

- Initial promising studies show reductions on outcomes like physical aggression.
 - Antle, Sar, Christensen, Ellers, Karam, Barbee, & van zyl, (in press);
 - Antle, Karam, Christensen, Barbee, & Sar (2011).
- More rigorous evaluations are badly needed.



Sliding vs. Deciding A Relationship Transition and Risk Model

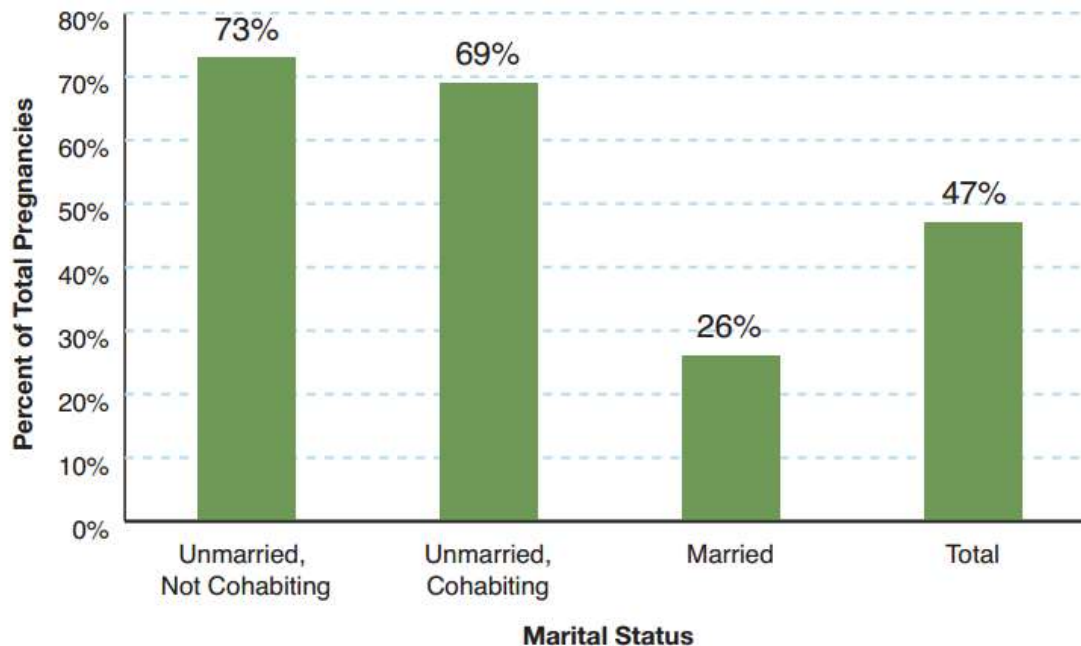
Scott Stanley & Galena Rhoades

- Our work emphasizes risk is associated with the way important transitions occur.
- The conceptual model is founded in research on cohabitation but it applies to many transitions with implications for risk (e.g., sex, cohabitation, pregnancy).

Brief History of Concepts

- This conceptual grew out of research on cohabitation and commitment.
- Cohabitation risks people do not readily see:
 - Inertia
 - Constraints build before mutual dedication is strong
 - Stanley, Rhoades, & Markman (2006)
 - Making it harder to break up before determining if in a good place
 - Unplanned children in low commitment contexts

- The rate of unplanned pregnancies is much greater among unmarried, cohabiting women than it is among married women.

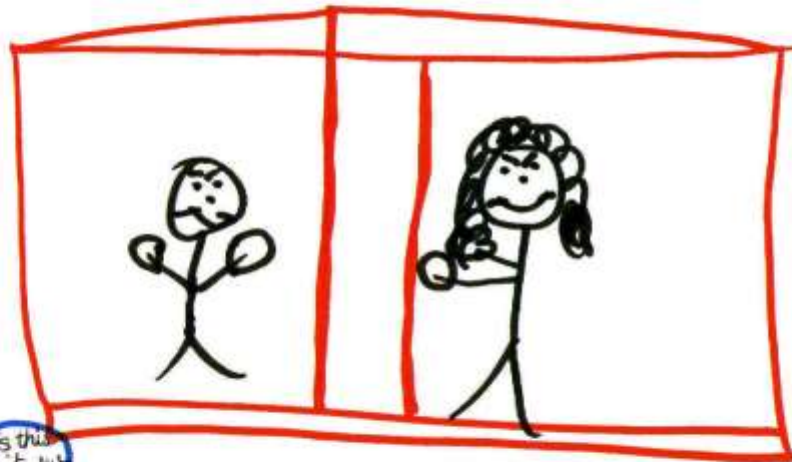
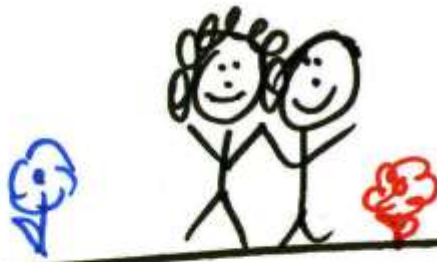


- The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy:
https://thenationalcampaign.org/sites/default/files/resource-primary-download/dcr_sectiona.pdf

Cohabitation Implications

- Many couples slide into cohabitation
 - Manning & Smock (2005)
- But commitments and follow-through are based on decisions.
 - Stanley, Rhoades, & Markman (2006)
- Sex too soon often leads to cohabiting too soon
 - Sassler, Addo, & Lichter (2012)
- Inertia takes over.
 - Fragile couples stay together longer and have children.
 - Multiple Partnered Fertility

One sunny day



3 months
later



Brief Comment on Recent Research

- Cohabitation before marriage for a specific couple is likely less risky, overall, than it used to be.
- Cohabitation is otherwise associated with increasing complexity and risk:
 - Serial cohabitation
 - Children in low commitment contexts
- Cohabiting before having mutual commitment to the future is associated with lower quality relationships and more risk for divorce.
 - See various published studies from our lab:
 - Galena Rhoades, Scott Stanley, & Howard Markman

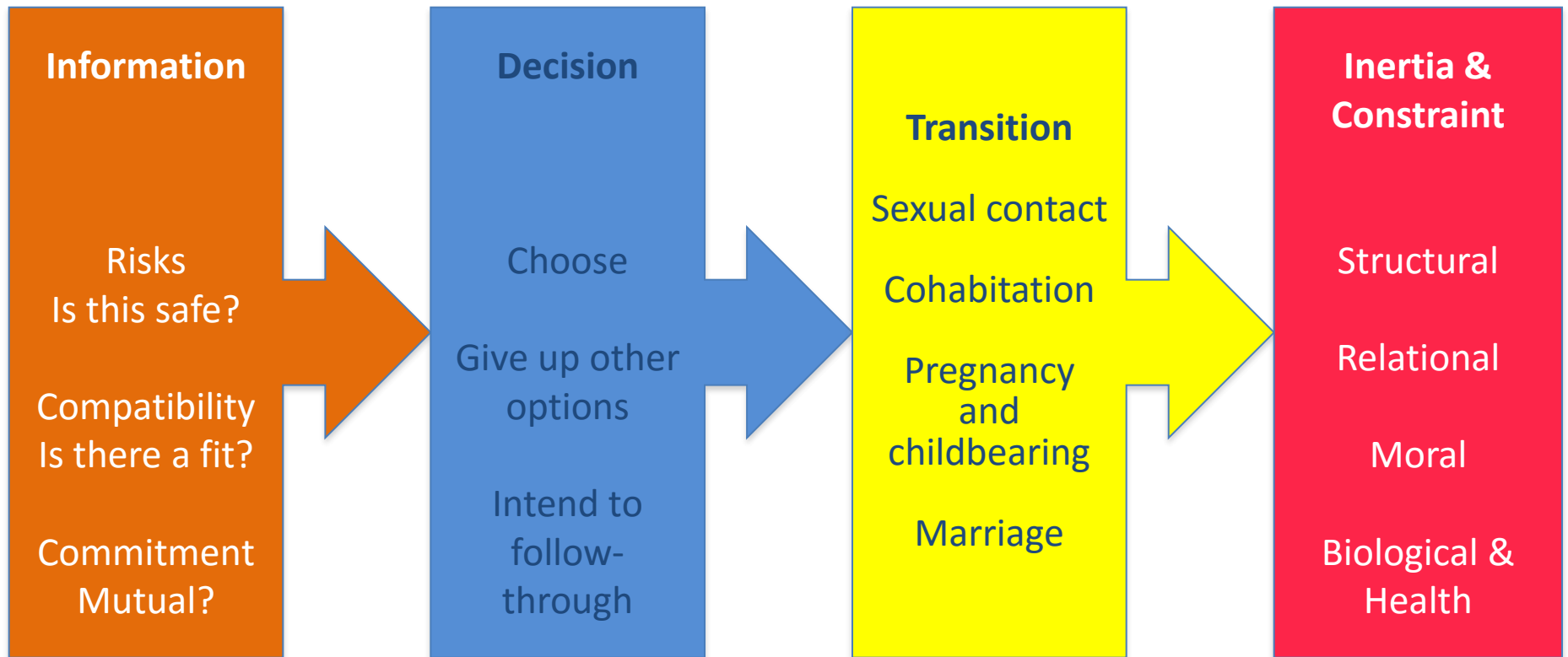
What Important
Relationship
Transitions Do
People Slide
Through?



- Sex
- Cohabitation
- Pregnancy and childbearing
- Marriage (when inertia is strong)

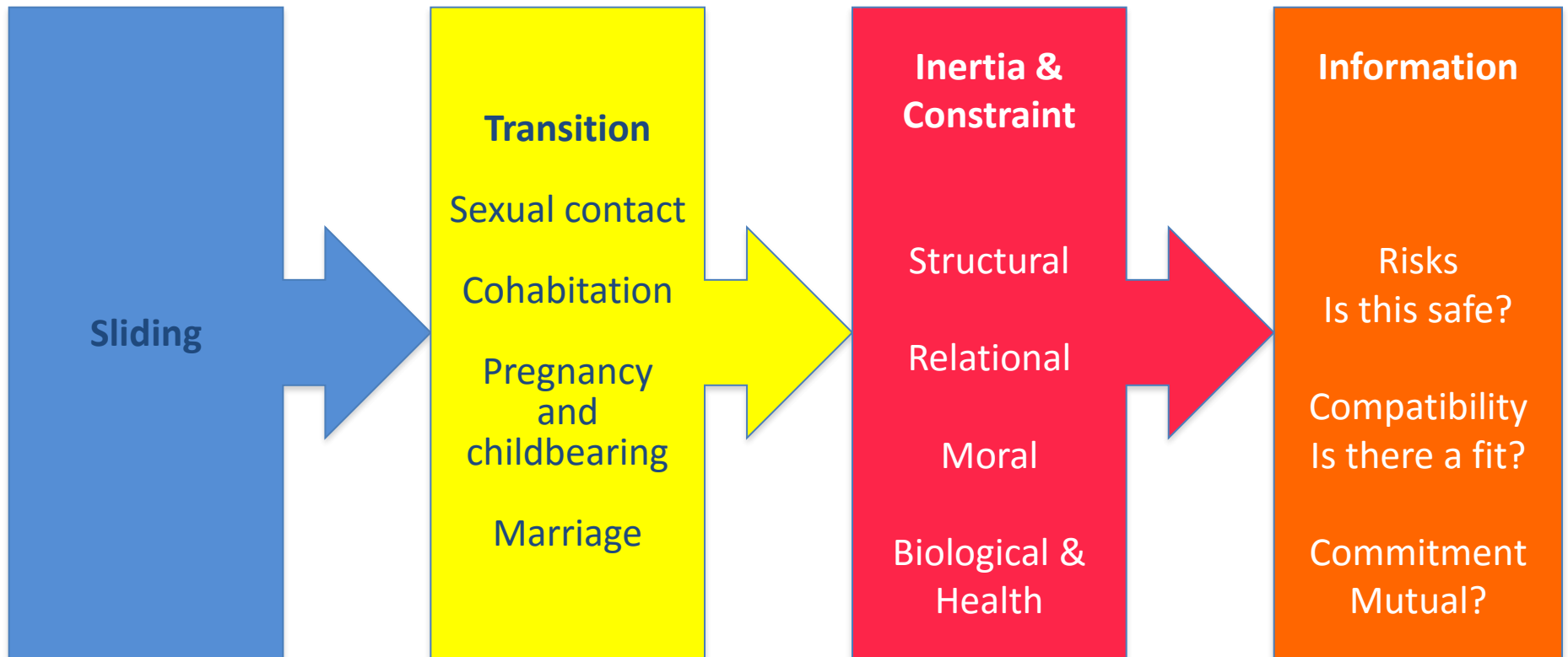
A Lower Risk Sequence

(A Theoretical Model: Stanley & Rhoades)



A Higher Risk Sequence

(A Theoretical Model: Stanley & Rhoades)



Prevention Messages from WMR:

High Cost Slides

- You slide into something that is potentially life altering.
- After the slide, you have less options than you had before.
- You find out information that would have been better to know BEFORE sliding into the situation.



What's the big deal about **sliding**?

- Losing options before making a choice
 - Sliding generates constraints before dedication is fully developed.
- In contrast, healthy commitment is about freely chosen constraints.

Risk Management

- The key is to having information about the risk of a transition BEFORE one has gone through it and foreclosed options.
- Sliding transitions, not decision-based, are becoming a norm for all economic groups . . .
 - . . . BUT disadvantaged individuals have fewer resources to cope with a loss of any options on a higher risk path.

What's Cooking?



Why **Deciding** Matters:

Decisions Set up Follow-Through

- In long-term relationships like marriage, Deciding transitions should set up stronger follow-through than sliding transitions.
 - Cognitive Dissonance and action tendencies (e.g., Harmon-Jones & Harmon-Jones)
 - “I choose you.”
 - “I chose this path.”

My Blog

www.slidingvsdeciding.com

My Page at The University of Denver

<http://portfolio.du.edu/sstanley>

Relationship Education Curricula from PREP:

www.PREPinc.com

Some of the central references from our work on the ideas in this talk

- Stanley, S. M., Rhoades, G. K., & Whitton, S. W. (2010). Commitment: Functions, formation, and the securing of romantic attachment. *Journal of Family Theory and Review*, 2, 243-257.
- Stanley, S. M., Rhoades, G. K., & Markman, H. J. (2006). Sliding vs. Deciding: Inertia and the premarital cohabitation effect. *Family Relations*, 55, 499 - 509.
- Stanley, S. M., Rhoades, G. K., & Fincham, F. D. (2011). Understanding romantic relationships among emerging adults: The significant roles of cohabitation and ambiguity. In F. D. Fincham & M. Cui (Eds.), *Romantic relationships in emerging adulthood* (pp. 234-251). New York: Cambridge University Press.

Some of the central references from our work on the Ideas in this talk

[the Transition and Risk model as presented is in the following chapter online.]

- Stanley, S. M., & Rhoades, G. K. (2009). Marriages at risk: Relationship formation and opportunities for relationship education. In H. Benson and S. Callan (Eds.), *What works in relationship education: Lessons from academics and service deliverers in the United States and Europe* (pp. 21 - 44). Doha, Qatar: Doha International Institute for Family Studies and Development.
 - See section starting “Our Work on Transition and Risk”
 - Available at: <http://www.relationshipeducation.info/downloads/pdf/02%20Stanley-Rhoades.pdf>
- Rhoades, G. K., & Stanley, S. M. (2009). Relationship education for individuals: The benefits and challenges of intervening early. In H. Benson and S. Callan (Eds.), *What works in relationship education: Lessons from academics and service deliverers in the United States and Europe* (pp. 45 - 54). Doha, Qatar: Doha International Institute for Family Studies and Development.
 - <http://www.relationshipeducation.info/downloads/pdf/03%20Rhoades-Stanley.pdf>

Some of the central references from our work on the Ideas in this talk

- Rhoades, G. K., & Stanley, S. M. (2011). Using individual-oriented relationship education to prevent family violence. *Journal of Couple and Relationship Therapy*, 10, 185-200.

Some of the data papers from our team on these themes

- Rhoades, G. K., Stanley, S. M., & Markman, H. J. (2009). The pre-engagement cohabitation effect: A replication and extension of previous findings. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 23, 107-111.
- Rhoades, G. K., Stanley, S. M., & Markman, H. J. (2010). Should I stay or should I go? Predicting dating relationship stability from four aspects of commitment. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 24(5), 543-550.
- Stanley, S. M., Rhoades, G. K., Amato, P. R., Markman, H. J., & Johnson, C. A. (2010). The timing of cohabitation and engagement: Impact on first and second marriages. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 72, 906-918.
- Rhoades, G. K., Stanley, S. M., & Markman, H. J. (2012). The impact of the transition to cohabitation on relationship functioning: Cross-sectional and longitudinal findings. *Journal of Family Psychology*.

Other Research Cited

- Manning, W. D., & Smock, P. J. (2005). Measuring and modeling cohabitation: New perspectives from qualitative data. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 67, 989 - 1002.
- Antle, B., Sar, B., Christensen, D., Ellers, F., Barbee, A., & van Zyl, M. (2013). The impact of the Within My Reach Relationship training on relationship skills and outcomes for low-income individuals. *Journal of Marital & Family Therapy*, 39(3), 346-357. doi:10.1111/j.1752-0606.2012.00314.x
- Antle, B. F., Karam, E., Christensen, D. N., Barbee, A. P., & Sar, B. K. (2011). An evaluation of healthy relationship education to reduce intimate partner violence. *Journal of Family Social Work*, 14(5), 387-406.