

Appealing to Hispanic Men (Migrant Workers): Strategies for Recruitment and Engagement in Marriage Education

The involvement of Hispanic men in a marriage education program can encourage Hispanic husbands and fathers to become more involved and more nurturing.

One way to strengthen Hispanic families and give hope to our society is to promote healthy relationships among couples and make marriage a priority. It is very important to develop a campaign in which the male figure in Hispanic families is motivated to engage in his relationship with his wife and children. Hispanic men need to understand (and be convinced) that they are not just providers, but their involvement is vital to the education and well-being of their children's lives.

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Unfortunately, among Hispanics (especially in some groups where education and training levels are low) male chauvinism compromises a man's free will to openly join their companions or wives in programs that address personal growth and behavior as a couple. The tendency is to believe that these programs are for the women because they are ultimately seen as the ones in charge of the children's education and keeping the husband happy.

The following tips were compiled by a program dedicated to serving low-income and migrant working families in South Florida. More than ten years of program operations have contributed to these strategies in regards to recruiting and retaining as many men as

possible who can benefit from marriage and relationship education.

- 1. Be aware of cultural differences.** It is important to understand different values, customs, ways of life, as well as specific couples' peculiarities related to the community to which they belong. Economic status can also present different realities especially when a lack of educational opportunities exists. For example, in the rural agricultural community, men have a tendency to be more introverted and are reluctant to open up to strangers or anyone unfamiliar to them.
- 2. Utilize Hispanic facilitators.** The program can be more effective if facilitated by another Hispanic couple, or someone that has adequately developed cultural awareness and sensitivity to the Hispanic community - especially Hispanic men. It is important that couples are able to speak in their own language and relate to the experiences of the presenters.



3. Utilize Hispanic recruiters. Hispanic men with a certain education level and profession need to be recruited by someone he can relate to and who shares a similar background. This will enhance the relationship by building trust and familiarity.

4. Choose a comfortable setting. Recruitment can be done in a community center gathering, school or church where Hispanic men feel welcome and at home.

5. Avoid referring to facilitators as “teachers.” The recruiting or facilitating couple should not present themselves as teachers or authoritative figures. This can create distance and discourage open participation from male prospects.

6. Dress in a non-threatening manner. For example, if the target community is made up of migrant farm workers; the facilitating couple should not wear three piece suits. This can create a psychological distance and will prevent the participants from engaging in an open manner.

7. Be conversational. Lectures are not as effective as a conversational style of sharing information. Do not expect participants to take notes or do written “homework” because in many cases couples are illiterate. In a group such as this, using a conversational style and knowledge about a particular community’s idiosyncrasies will have better results.

8. Be sensitive when addressing certain issues. The facilitator needs to be very sensitive when dealing with issues of who is the “head of the house.” The inappropriate handling of this matter could create an overt reaction from the men and premature arguments for couples. Challenging topics like this should be brought

up to the group once the facilitators have established a relationship and built up trust.

9. Never portray the wife in a way that is threatening or critical. The recruiter should be very careful since this will only make Hispanic men more distant and therefore they will disconnect from the main purpose of the program.

10. Recognize different thoughts and perspectives. Due to strong religious and cultural values, the facilitator needs to be extremely sensitive to different opinions and perspectives. It is necessary to be open-minded to the group’s thoughts.

To keep men engaged, the facilitator should keep an open mind and non-judgmental attitude. The participants should feel important because they are an integral part of the program.

If facilitators are not fully aware of cultural attributes and do not address them properly, it can challenge the willingness of men to participate. It is important for programs to gain the trust of potential participants. As a man in one program stated after going through several marriage education sessions, “it is important, even after several years of marriage, for a couple to walk together in public joining hands.” Prior to attending the workshop, both husband and wife perceived this gesture as embarrassing and something only for young people. However, during the workshop they realized this gesture recreated a connection for them that had been lost. It refreshed their relationship.

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Participants should feel important because they are an integral part of the program. To achieve this, facilitators must use appropriate verbal and non-verbal communication, dress code and behavior that will connect with participants. It is extremely important to respect the opinions of others and to feel that everyone's ideas are valued. Additionally, participants should feel that there is a true exchange of information for everyone to learn. To successfully engage Hispanic men, especially migrant workers, they should not feel that they are going to be scolded or attacked just because they are men (Hispanic culture stereotype). With this in mind, the first session is vital to establishing a welcoming and open environment.

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The involvement of Hispanic men in a marriage education program can encourage Hispanic husbands and fathers to become more involved and more nurturing. This can improve the quality of life in the family. For example in the Florida program, wives have expressed how they are more motivated and willing to keep working on their relationship. Participants also report improved educational outcomes among the children. Making men feel welcome, appreciated, respected and valued - regardless of their background or social economic status - is essential to recruiting and engaging Hispanic men.

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