



THE FIRST DANCE

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Facilitator Guide

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FACILITATOR GUIDE

Version 1.0

Time: two hours

Equipment: DVD player, TV monitor (large screen is best), name tags, pens, chairs placed in a circle around the TV, table for couples to write notes (optional), and optional snacks for the break.

Handouts: Couple and Family principles, Vignette exercise

Number of couples: suggested minimum of three, maximum of seven

Introduction for Facilitator

This guide will help you facilitate the group in a smooth way. It's a fairly easy process that requires familiarity with the content and flow of the DVD, and basic group facilitation skills such as making participants feel comfortable, letting them know what is expected at each point in the program, making sure everyone gets a chance to speak, not letting anyone dominate by debating or giving speeches, keeping the group focused on the topic at hand instead of drifting into a general conversation, and in general keeping the process moving along.

It is important to focus on wedding planning as a learning opportunity, and not to imply that couples in the group are focusing too much time and energy on the wedding. This will drive them underground with their concerns. Stay away from bashing the wedding industry, as couples might think you are indirectly criticizing them for dealing with the wedding industry. Instead, follow the program's lead in emphasizing that couples should operate from their own values, and let the lessons of the program come to them gradually throughout the two hours, rather than from you in a direct way at the outset. For example, avoid telling couples that they will learn lessons to apply in their marriage in the future. Let them discover this on their own.



THE FIRST DANCE

www.TheFirstDance.com

Facilitator Guide

Keep in mind that this is an educational program, not a therapy group. Don't get into extensive problem solving discussions with couples about their particular challenges; instead, refer back to the principles the program teaches, which couples can use on their own to help them understand and address their problems. If you notice that a couple seems to be having serious problems, you can speak with them privately after the group session.

FACILITATOR NOTES

Version 1.0

I. Welcome and Introduction

Welcome couples. Ask for introductions as follows, or in your own words.

“I'd like everyone to introduce yourself to the group. You can say your name, how long you have been engaged, your wedding date, and what struck your curiosity about this program on wedding planning. Again: name, how long engaged, wedding date, and your interest in what we are here to discuss.”

Note: If couples are required to attend the program as part of the standard premarital education in their faith community, then you can just ask for the basic introductory information and ask the group as a whole: “Does anyone want to say what struck your curiosity about this program?”

Introduce yourself at the end, saying how long you have been married (if you are married) and a few words about your interest in the program. See notes above about being low key here: express enthusiasm but don't promise too much or couples may feel like contradicting your expectations!

II. Brief Overview

You can orient the group to what will follow with words like these:

“This is a DVD program on the people parts of wedding planning. The DVD covers principles for couples to work as a team and deal with their families. At a few points we will stop the DVD to reflect and discuss. We will have a short break in the middle. OK, let's get going.”

START THE DVD

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Facilitator Guide

III. Brief Response to Couple Principle #1: It's Your Day, But Not Only Your Day.

DVD time: about 6 minutes. Total time for response: 30 seconds

When the DVD suggests pausing after the first principle, hit the pause button and ask the group if they are on board with the first principle: "It's your day but not only your day." You can use words such as these:

"Any questions or concerns about this principle? It says that if you are going to invite family and friends to your wedding, you have to take their needs and values into consideration."

Just look for head nods or quizzical looks. We have not found anyone disagreeing with this principle, but we want people to actually pause here in order to take in its significance. A lot of the people stress in wedding planning comes from the opposite assumption: that everyone should line up like good soldiers to support the bridal couple, and bring forward no needs or values to "impose" on the couple. If someone asks if the principle means that couples have to cow tow to everyone, you can clarify that this principle does not say that others should get their way, only that the couple take other people into consideration. In other words, there are stakeholders besides the bride and groom. Don't allow a discussion about specific situations couples are facing; if someone begins to tell a story about an interfering relative or another boorish engaged couple they know, politely ask the to hold off until later in the program. When done, say it's time to move on.

RESUME DVD

IV. Exercise for Couple Principle #2: Be a team

DVD time: about 10 minutes

Total time for exercise: 10 minutes

The DVD sets up the instructions for this exercise. Your role is to ask each couple to pair up and remind them of the task: to discuss how they see their current roles in wedding planning (the three categories) and how this is working for them. Give them three minutes for the couple conversations and then pull the group back together. Ask this question:

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“Would anyone like to share something they learned, or re-learned, from this exercise?”

Note 1: Saying “learn or re-learn” in the question indicates that you are not expecting that this will be a powerful new learning for everyone, which heads off participants from dismissing the exercise by saying “We already knew our roles.”

Wait patiently for someone to go first, then ask for others to speak if they like. Usually every couple will want share, and you can go around the group. You can affirm what they learned, perhaps ask a clarifying question, but don’t probe or allow a lot of commentary from the rest of the group. It is crucial for this program that you not judge what couples say about their roles or assumptions you might have about the best roles. Couple will close up if they sense that there is a party line about how they should be acting as a couple. If a couple say they are in disagreement about their roles, or how they are enacting them, you can be supportive by indicating that it’s good that they are talking about their differences—but don’t problem solve with them. When everyone who wants to share has done so, say you want to move on.

Note 2: Three minutes should be enough time for the couple dialogue. If you notice that most of the group has finished in two minutes, end it then. You don’t want people looking around and being bored. Wait patiently for at least one couple to share with the group.

Note 3: In a very quiet group, if no one else is ready to go second, then move on. In a large or talkative group, there may not be enough time for everyone to speak. You can watch your time and at some point ask if anyone has a “different set of roles” that they might want to speak about.

RESUME DVD

- V. Exercise for Couple Principle #4: Know Your Emotional Limits
DVD time: about 33 minutes Total time for exercise: 20 minutes

The first two exercises help the group warm up for this deeper one. It has three parts: individual reflection, individual couple sharing, and group sharing. The instructions are given clearly on the DVD. When the DVD says to pause and begin the exercise, you can ask participants to begin their minute of personal reflection, which will be followed by three minutes of couple dialogue.



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Facilitator Guide

- Remind participants that the exercise is for each person to reflect on how he or she individually goes off track emotionally when under stress, and how the partner can help. You can remind the group light heartedly that everyone is to think about self only, not the partner. If people start talking to each other during the moment of silence, gently remind them that this is time for individual reflection. (The rationale: a moment of reflection makes everyone responsible for coming up with something; if you begin with couple talk, one partner is apt to start generating ideas for both of them!)
- Couple dialogue: after the moment of silent reflection, ask participants to pair up with their partner and share their reflections. Remind them that there are two parts to share: how each person gets off base when under stress (speaking about self, not the other!), and how they would like the other to respond during those difficult moments.

Note 1: Participants often have revelations about themselves and their relationships during this exercise, and often become open with the group. This only occurs if the facilitator creates an accepting atmosphere where it's okay to air one's imperfections. Everyone goes off track sometimes, and it is helpful to know one's common patterns and what the partner might do to respond constructively. It would be helpful for the facilitator to do personal reflection on this question, although sharing it is not necessary.

Note 2: If this exercise is going well, there will be laughter as well as learning.

Note 3: Here as elsewhere in the program, don't worry about repeating instructions; often at least one person does not understand or follow at first. It's a good practice to ask if everyone understands before you launch the group into an exercise. Confusion about instructions creates anxiety in a group and undermines their confidence in the process.

BREAK

DVD time: about 37 minutes

The DVD program mentions taking a break here. It's a good idea to take a five minute break. Just a short one, so as not to lose momentum.



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Facilitator Guide

VI. Family Principles

After considering and trying different approaches, we decided that the DVD will present the family principles straight through and then to offer one low-intensity exercise at the end. Our rationale is that this family material can be threatening to couples because it can stir up loyalty issues related to families of origin and in-laws. We do not want to draw out problems couples are having with their parents in a two-hour educational group. Instead, we present principles for understanding and dealing with common family challenges, and leave it to couples to go home and apply these principles to their own situations. The program helps them internalize the principles through the analysis of stories presented on the DVD and through the following exercise which is noted in the DVD at the end of the presentation of the family principles and the audience stories.

Family Principles Exercise: Wedding Planning Vignette

DVD time: about 1 hr, 18 minutes Total time for exercise: 10 minutes

This learning exercise asks participants to use the principles to analyze a true story of wedding planning under stress. (The vignette, which should be distributed to each participant, is appended.) The facilitator can set up the exercise this way:

“After I read the vignette, I’d like you to look at your handout of the couple and family principles and see which ones apply to what has happened here and what they might do about their situation.”

Hand out the vignette and read the vignette—preferably with gusto. Then go on.

“Now I’d like you to take a couple of minutes of individual reflection on this story. Look at the sheet with the couple and family principles and ask yourself which ones apply here. Feel free to write down your thoughts on the sheet if you like. Afterwards, we will have group discussion.”

Give two minutes of reflection time. Then say:

“Who would like to share one of the principles that applies here?”



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Facilitator Guide

Facilitate the discussion, letting a number of participants get in. Appended is the facilitator version with a list of principles that we believe are evidence in the story. If one of them does not come out in the discussion, you can ask if anyone noticed that principle, and describe how you think it is relevant.

Note 1: It's often good to ask people to share just one principle at a time, so as to avoid a "star student" exhausting the list in one fell swoop.

Note 2: The purpose of the exercise is to help couples learn the principles just explained to them on the DVD. We suggest you be cautious about introducing brand new concepts at the end of the program (an example would be a commentary on self-esteem problems in the bride). There are lots of other ways to understand the dynamics of the vignette, but exercise caution about getting into them right now.

Note 3: If the group starts to sound negative and judgmental about people in the story, introduce a note of compassion and understanding: it's hard for couples to not go off track in today's culture of weddings, and we don't do a good job of helping couples and families understand what is happening to them.

When the discussion seems complete, continue the DVD for the ending of the presentation.

VII. Ending exercise

The goal is to bring closure to the group by letting participants say what they are taking with them from this experience. You can use these words, or your own:

"I'd like us to take a moment to reflect on what you are taking with your from our time today. What did you learn? Any discoveries, new insights, or confirmation of what you already knew or believed? Really, anything you want to say to end our experience together. Who would like to go first?"

After someone starts, invite others to share as well. When everyone is finished, share your appreciation for the group and anything that stood out to you in terms of your own learning from the material or from the group members. Honor their work during the past two hours and their commitment to their futures.



THE FIRST DANCE

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Facilitator Guide

Note 1: It's often best to go around clockwise or counter-clockwise when you are inviting group sharing, in order to avoid clumsy pauses while people wait to see who is next. However, if someone placed elsewhere in the circle chimes in immediately after the first person, let it happen spontaneously. It is good, however, to ask everyone to share something at the end, just as you invited everyone to speak at the beginning. All sharing in between should be completely optional.

Note 2: Avoid the temptation to tell couples that these are very important principles that they will need for the rest of their lives. This may come across as patronizing, and in any event it not particularly useful. It's enough that they are learning something that helps them now; if the learning is powerful enough, it will stay with them without any of us telling them not to forget!

VIII. Optional Evaluation and Additional First Dance Material

We have provided a brief evaluation form that you can give to couples after the ending exercise. You can say the following, or use your own words:

“Before you leave, it would be helpful to us if you could fill out this brief evaluation form that will help us with future planning for groups.”

Hand out the evaluation form. While you are passing it out, you can say:

“You might be interested to know that there is an individual version of this DVD that you can acquire and watch at home with your parents. They might be very interested in this program. The First Dance also offers a membership with an advice column and an internet chat room moderated by someone familiar with the program's principles. You might find it helpful. The website address is on the handout you can take with you: www.thefirstdance.com.”



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Facilitator Guide

Couple Principles

1. **It's your day, but not only your day.**
2. **Be a team.**

If you are a good team, you can handle almost anything—but you have to know what kind of team you are. We have observed three general kinds of teams:

 - **The bride is in charge.** She is the planner and decision maker. She keeps the groom informed and may assign him certain tasks.
 - **Leader/Supporter.** The bride is the clear leader but the groom helps make decisions and may have his own areas of responsibility, such as dealing with his parents and the men in the wedding party.
 - **Co-Leaders:** They make all major decisions together. They divide responsibility for gathering information prior to make joint decisions, and they may also have some separate areas of responsibility.
3. **It's about values, not just activities or things.**

Stay focused on your values—about marriage, family, tradition, religion, friends, money—and let decisions flow mostly from these values rather than from comparisons with what other couples are doing.
4. **Know what's a big deal—and not a big deal.**

Let each other know what's most important to you about the wedding--and what the values are behind it—as well as what's not so important because there are no major values behind it.
5. **Know your emotional limits.**

Be honest about how you handle the stress of making decisions and following through, and what you need from each other when you are not coping well. Here are some examples of how people get off track when they are stressed:

| | |
|-------------------------|-----------------------------|
| ▪ Worry wart | ▪ Complainer |
| ▪ Procrastinator | ▪ Temper outbursts |
| ▪ Nagger | ▪ Don't ask for help |
| ▪ Avoider | ▪ Act helpless |
| ▪ Silent martyr | |



THE FIRST DANCE

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Facilitator Guide

Family Principles

- 1. Make decisions tentatively until you find out who else in the family expects to be involved.**
- 2. Know when you are just talking and when you have decided something. If you are not sitting down and discussing the matter, it's probably not a decision.**
- 3. When there is conflict, blood talks to blood.**
- 4. Prepare your fiancé and each others families for the quirks and odd customs of the other family.**
- 5. Do not mock the ways of your in-laws, strange though they may be.**
- 6. You can't change your parents or your in-laws; they are like the weather. Focus on decisions to be made, not on their attitudes and feelings.**
- 7. Some people act out of character and just plain strange during wedding planning. There is usually an underlying reason.**
- 8. Don't let anyone blackmail you with threats to boycott the wedding or withdraw their support; move ahead and let them make their own decisions.**
- 9. Since impossible people are predictable in their bad behavior, plan accordingly rather than being surprised and outraged.**

**THE FIRST DANCE****Vignette Exercise –Facilitator Version****A Bride’s Nightmare Story**

I have nearly killed (at least once if not twice) every member of his family and mine.... We have 10 hellish months to go and I am HATING all this planning. Nobody on either side of the family likes anything I have already chosen, am going to do, or will get around to doing.... I hate this. This is my wedding day and it’s supposed to be about ME. My fiancé, one night when I was screaming hysterically saying how much I hated everything that was happening around me, said “Let’s just cancel it all and go to Jamaica!” At first I said yes but then I realized he intended to STILL have both our families there. THESE ARE THE VERY PEOPLE I WANT TO KILL! So, I would merely be moving all the personal complaints, disagreements and stress locally to another country. We are still having the wedding we originally planned, but I wish I had just gone down to the local registry office in my jeans and a t-shirt and said "Marry us now, please!"--and then told our families to get over it!!!!

Questions:**1. Why is this going badly?**

Couple issues related to the principles:

- It’s all about the bride, even though others are invited
- Everything is a big deal
- Lack of teamwork
- Values behind decisions are not clear
- Emotional limits reached but little acknowledgement or help



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Vignette Exercise –Facilitator Version

Family issues related to the principles:

- Not including family in decision making
- Mocking in-laws
- Not accepting that she cannot change parents and in-laws attitudes and feelings
- Know when you've made a decision and when you're just talking (on decision to leave the country)

2. What can the bride and groom do about it, based on the principles in this program?

- Understand the day is bigger than just the two of them
 - Be a team and know what roles they play
 - Blood talks to blood – groom has to deal with his family
- Get in touch with their core values, what is really important and what isn't