

# MU program gives social workers tools to strengthen relationships, marriages

September 2 2011

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Child welfare professionals know that children are safer and healthier when the adults in their lives have healthy relationships, but most social workers are not trained to educate couples about strong relationships and marriages. Researchers at the University of Missouri are working to train child welfare professionals and future social workers to help individuals and families strengthen their relationships.

Funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families, Healthy Relationship and Marriage Education Training (HRMET), is a five-year project facilitated by MU Extension and David Schramm, assistant professor of human development and family studies and state extension specialist in the MU College of Human Environmental Sciences. The purpose of the project is to develop training programs that give child welfare workers basic tools to foster positive relationships. The ultimate goal is to improve the stability and well-being of children by helping their parents and caregivers form and maintain strong couple and marital relationships.

"Many parents face multiple stressors that can weaken their couple relationships and spill over into parent-child relationships," Schramm said. "If [social workers](#) can teach parents to be more kind, understanding and respectful in their couple relationships, the result will be safer, happier environments for children."

HRMET's curriculum is two-pronged: a graduate-level course for social work students at MU and online and one-day training sessions for child

welfare professionals. Both courses give current and future social workers simple tools to help parents choose partners, manage conflict and remain committed in their relationships.

"Most social work graduate programs focus on helping children, so the subject of healthy relationships for parents tends to be left out," Schramm said. "This project is exciting because the fields of human development and family studies and social work are merging for the first time to create better tools for child welfare professionals."

The graduate course is being taught for the second time this fall; six workshops were offered in the summer for social work professionals. More than 200 social workers throughout the state have received training and the feedback indicates that it is meeting a need within the profession.

"I learned a great deal about communication within couples, different communication styles and how to teach partners to communicate positively," said a HRMET participant. "As a child welfare worker, I can now identify problems within clients' relationships, explain to couples how their relationships affect their children, and offer them tools to help open the lines of communication."

Provided by University of Missouri-Columbia

Citation: MU program gives social workers tools to strengthen relationships, marriages (2011, September 2) retrieved 23 June 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2011-09-mu-social-workers-tools-relationships.html>

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