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## Using Individual-oriented Relationship Education to Prevent Family Violence

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### Abstract

Relationship aggression has negative effects on adults, children, and on our society that cannot be overstated. In this paper, we first outline the benefits of using relationship education programs that are delivered to individuals (rather than couples) in preventing relationship aggression and co-occurring relationship aggression toward children. Next, we briefly review one such program, *Within My Reach*, and related research on its effectiveness in preventing relationship aggression. Implications of this research for future research, clinical practice, and policy are also discussed.

### Keywords

physical aggression; intimate partner violence; couple and relationship education

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The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimate that at least one-quarter of women are victims of relationship aggression in their lifetimes (Center for Disease Control, 2003; Leone, Johnson, Cohan, & Lloyd, 2004) and the rates are even higher among racial minorities, those with low-income levels, and in unmarried families and families with young children (Catalano, 2007; Leone et al., 2004; Oliver, Kuhns, & Pomeranz, 2006; Slep & O'Leary, 2005). The negative impact that family violence has on children, adults, and society is well-documented. Physical aggression against women is associated with reduced work productivity, greater reliance on government assistance, and worse mental and physical health (Center for Disease Control, 2003; Leone et al., 2004). Children who witness relationship aggression are at greater risk for abuse themselves, as well as poorer mental and physical health (Edleson, 1999; Knickerbocker, Heyman, Slep, Jouriles, & McDonald, 2007; Repetti, Taylor, & Seeman, 2002). Clearly, this all-too-pervasive problem warrants our prevention and intervention efforts, especially those that are informed by and able to be refined by ongoing research.

For the purposes of this paper, we will use the broad term “relationship aggression” to refer to any form of physical violence that takes place between romantic partners, regardless of frequency or severity (i.e., from throwing something at one’s partner to causing life-threatening injuries). Defined this way, relationship aggression is common, with 48% of couples in dating relationships reporting that it has occurred at least once (Rhoades, Stanley, Kelmer, & Markman, in press). The literature on violence makes further distinctions between types of relationship aggression (see Johnson & Ferraro, 2000). The one that we rely on in this paper is Johnson’s (1995) distinction between intimate terrorism and situational couple violence. Intimate terrorism refers to couples in which there is a clear batterer who threatens and controls, and a partner who could be considered the victim. This

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kind of aggression may be ongoing for several years and is more likely to include serious injury or homicide than is situational couple violence. Situational couple violence is much more common (Johnson & Leone, 2005); in this type of relationship aggression, both partners typically engage in physical aggression that stems from poor conflict resolutions skills rather than from more pathological, controlling personality traits (cf. Holtzworth-Munroe, Meehan, Herron, Rehman, & Stuart, 2000).

Both types are clearly important to prevent, as any form of aggression is unacceptable and can be associated with negative outcomes, but most interventions to date seem to focus on intimate terrorism. Specifically, interventions are often delivered to men who have already assaulted a woman and are involved in the legal system as a result (see Holtzworth-Munroe, 2002) or to women who have gone to shelter or legal authorities because of severe, ongoing relationship aggression. Many of the existing services, therefore, tend to be provided only after high-severity incidents, rather than early enough that raising awareness and providing education may foster primary prevention (Slep & Heyman, 2008).

A few primary prevention programs do exist and they are typically delivered in middle and high schools. Although some of these programs for youth show promise in their effectiveness (e.g., Wolfe et al., 2003), most studies of effectiveness have been flawed in ways that make it difficult to know whether they actually prevent relationship aggression (Whitaker et al., 2006). Further, leaders in the field have argued that these programs for youth are not enough to combat the enormity of the problem of relationship aggression our society faces (Whitaker et al., 2006). In this paper, we argue that relationship education for adults, delivered to individuals rather than couples, may be an innovative way to reach those who are at risk for future relationship aggression and to provide programming that may help prevent it.

## **Why Use a Relationship Education Approach to Reach At-Risk Families?**

### **History of relationship education**

Historically, relationship education has focused on couples, rather than individuals. In fact, relationship education was almost defined as being “couple” or “marriage” education, perhaps partly because the relationship education field was born out of the couple therapy field (e.g., Markman & Floyd, 1980). It is typically delivered to small groups of couples in a format in which couples learn new skills through mixed lecture and discussion and then have time to practice these skills as a couple. There are now meta-analytic studies indicating that these couple-focused, relationship education efforts tend to be effective in improving communication and preventing relationship distress (Fawcett, Hawkins, Blanchard, & Carroll, 2010; Hawkins, Blanchard, Baldwin, & Fawcett, 2008).

At the same time, it is clear that such efforts may be the least effective at reaching those at highest risk for serious relationship distress and aggression (Stanley, Amato, Johnson, & Markman, 2006; Sullivan & Bradbury, 1997). In community or faith-based settings where relationship education is delivered to couples and in studies of the effectiveness of relationship education, those who report a history of relationship aggression are often discouraged from attending and sometimes are actively screened out. A self-selection process may also occur in which couples with ongoing aggression, at least those experiencing intimate terrorism, may avoid relationship education services for fear of provoking the partner, being embarrassed, or reported to the police or child protective services. These dynamics mean that couple-based efforts may not reach those who are most at risk for relationship aggression.

Additionally, few couple-based programs include detailed education about aggression. Practitioners may fear that discussing aggression with both partners present would be off-putting or that it could lead to increased risk of aggression for a victim of an abuser. Particularly in instances of intimate terrorism, if a perpetrator fears that his or her partner is learning strategies to become safe through the program, he or she may become more violent as a way to control or dominate him or her.

Relationship aggression has also rarely been measured in studies of the effectiveness of relationship education. There are two exceptions of which we are aware. There is research indicating that married couples who received the Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program (PREP; Markman, Stanley, & Blumberg, 2010) reported lower levels of relationship aggression than control couples even years after they received the intervention (Markman, Renick, Floyd, Stanley, & Clements, 1993). On the other hand, a recent report on a very large-scale federal study of relationship education delivered to unmarried couples with low income levels who were expecting a baby found that at most service-delivery sites, there was no effect of couple-based relationship education on relationship aggression (Wood, McConnell, Moore, Clarkwest, & Hsueh, 2010). At one site, there was more relationship aggression for those who received couple-based relationship education than for the control group (Wood et al., 2010). This finding suggests either potentially detrimental effects of couple-based services or, at the very least, that there is a complex relationship between these services, selection issues for receiving them, relationship break-up, and aggression. Future work is needed to understand the mechanisms of this effect. If replicated, such evidence would call for adjustments in how such services are offered, particularly to couples with fragile commitment, lower relationship quality, and high-stress contexts.

More generally, couple-based prevention strategies generally assume an ongoing, committed relationship that both partners can (and generally reasonably should) want to continue into the future. With couple-based services, the focus is typically on improving communication or conflict management skills, and enhancing positive aspects of connection, with both partners present. With couples, it also makes sense to focus on strategies to help committed partners act on, and deepen, mutual commitment to the relationship. Such approaches are not, however, well suited to the needs of those who either are not in relationships at present or who are in relationships where the viability, safety, or suitability of partner matching is an issue. Hence, the downside of the couple-oriented programs most typically employed is that they often do not meet the needs of those in very unhealthy relationships or who experience relationship aggression (Rhoades & Stanley, 2009).

### **Individual-oriented relationship education**

In individual-oriented relationship education, no assumptions about whether an individual is in a relationship or not or about the quality or commitment of a current relationship need to be made. Individuals should attend by themselves, not with partners. Rhoades and Stanley (2009) review general benefits of an individual-oriented approach to relationship education and highlight that one key strength of individual-oriented approaches is that they can include frank, open discussions about aggression and leaving dangerous relationships. Essentially, individual-oriented approaches can focus on strategies geared toward the best possible outcomes for the individual and his or her children in a manner couple-based services cannot (Rhoades & Stanley, 2009). Next, we review content areas for individual-oriented relationship education and ways it can address relationship aggression and associated risk factors directly.

**Content about relationship aggression**—One clear goal for individual-oriented relationship education is to help attendees recognize warning signs for relationship

aggression. Teaching this kind of information is particularly important because there is evidence that individuals who have experienced relationship aggression in past relationships, or who are at risk for relationship aggression because of other characteristics, tend to partner with other high-risk individuals (Capaldi & Crosby, 1997). Individuals can learn to pay close attention to characteristics of a partner that may indicate that the relationship is or could become, unsafe (such as extreme jealousy, emotional volatility, attempts to control money or one's access to friends, intimidation; Leone et al., 2004). They can also learn how to identify other, more general risk factors for aggression, such as a history of aggression in other relationships, substance abuse, and problems with mental health (O'Leary, Smith Slep, & O'Leary, 2007; Stith, Smith, Penn, Ward, & Tritt, 2004), and how to get help for these problems, should they be experiencing them personally.

For those in a relationship that is already dangerous, individual-oriented relationship education can help them learn ways to recognize when their safety and the safety of their children is most at risk and how to get the most appropriate help. Individual-oriented relationship education can be appropriate both for individuals experiencing situational couple violence and/or for those who are in a relationship with an intimate terrorist. If enough psychoeducation on aggression is presented, attendees can decide for themselves which type of aggression describes their own situation best and which kind of help is most appropriate, consistent with trends in the advocacy field to empower those who have been victimized. For example, some may desire help finding a counselor or a program to learn how to manage conflict safely while others, particularly those experiencing intimate terrorism, could decide that they need help leaving safely and that they should work with a domestic violence shelter. Referral information for these different kinds of services is very important in individual-oriented relationship education.

**Communication and conflict management skills**—Poor conflict resolution is a risk factor for relationship aggression (Stith et al., 2004), reflecting the dyadic nature of aggression in many romantic relationships (Capaldi, Kim, & Shortt, 2007). Individual-oriented relationship education can include a component on improving communication and conflict management skills. These skills can be applied to not only the primary romantic relationship (if there is one), but to other types of relationships, as well, such as with other family members or co-workers. For those who experience infrequent, mutual, and less severe aggression that occurs when arguments get out of control, these kinds of skills may be helpful in reducing conflict and therefore aggression. At the same time, it is likely that those who regularly have arguments that lead to physical aggression, particularly across multiple relationships, will need additional help. Further, if one wants to stay with a partner he or she sometimes experiences aggression with, it is likely important for both partners to learn new conflict management skills. In this way, relationship education can be a gateway to more specialized services such as individual or couple therapy.

Another potential benefit of teaching constructive patterns of communication and conflict management is that this training becomes part of an overall process of raising expectations of what is possible and acceptable in a healthy relationship. Therefore, a person not only can learn skills to use in various relationships, he or she is given another reference point for what to look for in future romantic relationships and partners, a theme we address next.

**Content about how to make good decisions in relationships**—When possible, it is important for an individual to recognize dangerous patterns in a potential partner before he or she allows a transition or event to happen in the relationship that reduces options for leaving (such as cohabiting or becoming pregnant). Given that many couples experience potentially constraining relationship transitions (sex, cohabitation, conception) fairly rapidly, and often without making clear, mutual decisions (see Manning & Smock, 2005), people can

rather easily find themselves in dangerous relationships that are hard to leave (cf. Rhoades et al., in press; Stanley, Rhoades et al., 2006). Further, there is evidence from recent research that substantial numbers of unmarried mothers, particularly those with histories of abuse, trust partners who should not be trusted, as is described in the work below by Burton, Cherlin, Winn, Estacion, and Holder-Taylor (2009).

A notable 87% of the mothers who engaged in misplaced trust had extensive untreated histories of physical and sexual abuse. These mothers teetered between being anxious, fearful, and depressed, trusted men easily, and quickly moved from one relationship to another. Marilyn, a 45-year-old White mother of four children had a long history of being physically and sexually abused. She continually entered and exited relationships with men, letting them move into her household only days after meeting them. She often developed grand plans for what she would do in these relationships including, in one situation, “getting her new man to buy her a \$300,000 condominium” although he was unemployed and had no savings. Most of the men that Marilyn invited into her home and the lives of her children abused her, her children, or both. (p. 1120)

Thus, to help prevent people from becoming trapped in unhealthy or unsafe relationships, individual-oriented relationship education should also cover information about the timing of relationship stages and how to know when a relationship is ready for the next step. Relationship education can give individuals an opportunity to think about what things they need to know or consider when making relationship decisions that could affect not only their own futures, but, as the example above highlights, their children’s futures, as well.

**Content about children and parenting**—Individual-oriented relationship education can also help attendees recognize and discuss the implications of their romantic relationship choices for the lives of their children. Edin and Kefalas (2005) found in their research with single mothers in low-income neighborhoods that many did not recognize how their own children were being impacted by the men they dated and their relationship experiences. This lack of awareness was especially true among those who had difficult family experiences while growing and/or histories of abuse. Based on this finding and those showing that rates of child abuse tend to be higher when nonbiological fathers are involved in children’s lives (e.g., Daly & Wilson, 1994), it makes sense to discuss the serious impact their relationship choices can have for their children and ways to protect them from risks. We believe a key strategy here is to help single parents recognize situations that put their children at risk for abuse or psychological harm (e.g., leaving a child with a new partner as a babysitter or allowing a child to meet and become attached to many romantic partners). There is growing concern that multiple attachments and break-ups in a parent’s romantic life may lead to both negative child outcomes (McLanahan, in press) and problems forming healthy, lasting emotional attachments in adulthood (cf. Cherlin, Hurt, Burton, & Purvin, 2004; Stanley, Rhoades, & Whitton, 2010).

**Gender and individual-oriented relationship education**—Women more often report being the victims of physical aggression by intimate partners and more often suffer from serious injuries from relationship aggression than do men (Archer, 2000). Because of these facts, many interventions about family violence are geared toward reducing men’s violent behavior toward women (for a discussion, see Holtzworth-Munroe, 2002). It is important that our field continues to pursue this approach, but, at the same time, it is important that we also empower women to use their resources not only to stop aggression against them and their children but to have improved odds of preventing future occurrences altogether.

Additionally, although they typically suffer more severe consequences than men do, women also perpetrate aggression within intimate relationships. In fact, some research indicates that



women are *more* likely than men to engage in partner aggression (Slep & O'Leary, 2005). Further, research suggests that among the vast majority of couples who experience relationship aggression, women and men both become aggressive and that it stems from conflict that is mishandled (Johnson, 1995). These research findings suggest that both men and women need to be part of violence prevention programs and that information should be included for individuals who may be victims, perpetrators, or both.

### **Within My Reach: An Individual-oriented Relationship Education Program**

*Within My Reach* (Pearson, Stanley, & Rhoades, 2008) is an individual-oriented relationship education curriculum that was developed in 2005. Because it is one of the first relationship education programs designed to be delivered to individuals rather than couples, many consultants were used during its development. Sociologist Michael Johnson, whose work on types of aggression was reviewed earlier, and Anne Menard, the director of the National Resource Center on Domestic Violence, were particularly helpful in refining the information that is presented on relationship aggression. In addition, portions of the curriculum were based on a risk paradigm concerning the nature of romantic relationship transitions (Stanley, Rhoades, & Markman, 2006) and others were adapted from Pearson's program for teens, *Love U2*, as well as Markman et al.'s (2010) PREP.

Broadly speaking, *Within My Reach* aims to 1) help those who see themselves in viable relationships to cultivate, protect, and stabilize their unions, and to marry, if desired, 2) help those in damaging relationships to leave safely, and/or 3) help those desiring a romantic relationship to choose future partners wisely (Pearson et al., 2008). Thus, the overarching objective in *Within My Reach* is to help individuals identify strategies for pursuing and succeeding in their own goals for relationships. It was not specifically designed as a violence-prevention program, but as we have suggested, we believe this kind of general, relationship education approach, when it includes detailed information on aggression, could be an innovative tool for preventing aggression in relationships and families.

The theoretical basis for *Within My Reach* is a cognitive-behavioral model of intervention. The curriculum assumes that it is important to change both behaviors and cognitions to improve relationships in general and to prevent violence in families. The curriculum aims to change behavior in several areas, including conflict management with romantic partners and in other close or family relationships, stay/leave decisions for unsafe relationships, mate selection for future relationships, and, for those who have children, co-parenting with ex-partners and balancing decisions in one's romantic life with the needs of one's children. With regard to cognitions, the curriculum focuses on improving self-esteem, increasing confidence in relationship decision-making, and knowing reasonable and unreasonable expectations for healthy relationships.

The general content of *Within My Reach* is in line with the Capaldi and Kim's (2007) Dynamic Developmental Systems Model of Partner Violence, and with their recommendations for prevention efforts. Specifically, it focuses on identifying and reducing personal risk factors for violent behavior (e.g., substance use, depression), helping attendees identify problem behaviors and risk factors in current and potential future partners, aiding them in leaving violent relationships safely, and teaching skills that improve interactions between partners, such as how to recognize escalation, use time-outs, and employ good communication and problem-solving skills. In addition, the curriculum helps attendees to consider the negative effects of relationship aggression for children, as is suggested by the Dynamic Developmental Systems Model of Partner Violence.

## Overview of Content

The *Within My Reach* curriculum is divided into three main sections with 15 units total (see Table 1). The first section of the curriculum introduces models of healthy relationships, covers principles for successfully choosing healthy partners and avoiding partners who could be dangerous, discusses reasonable versus unreasonable expectations for relationships, and helps attendees to recognize their own values about relationships by learning about their personality styles as well as how their own family backgrounds influence them. The family background component may be especially important from a violence-prevention perspective because a history of abuse in one's own family is a risk factor for aggression in romantic relationships (O'Leary et al., 2007). The first section also introduces two themes that are expanded in the rest of the curriculum. One theme is that relationships affect children. From here on, the curriculum often discusses ways in which "our love lives aren't neutral." The other theme is based on the "sliding vs. deciding" concept that was mentioned earlier (Stanley, Rhoades et al., 2006). The gist of this theme is that making potentially constraining or life-altering romantic transitions (e.g., sex, pregnancy, cohabitation, and, even marriage) is risky in the absence of informed decision making. Going slowly in relationships and making decisions, rather than just letting things happen, will generally lead to better relationship outcomes and be safer for involved children.

The middle section of the curriculum is devoted to learning about patterns of interaction in relationships and ways to improve communication and conflict management skills. There are messages about safety in relationships throughout the curriculum (e.g., hotline referrals, asking attendees not to take their workbooks home if they are unsure about the safety of their relationship), but this middle section of the curriculum provides a direct lesson about relationship aggression. This lesson is based on Johnson's (1995) types of violence, and focuses on helping those who may be in danger to recognize it.

There are not any set screening recommendations for participation in a *Within My Reach* class, so attendees may be single, in healthy relationships or marriages, in unhealthy, non-violent relationships, or in relationships with intimate terrorism or situational couple violence. Thus, in the material on aggression, attendees learn about differences between "arguments that get physical" (i.e., situational couple violence) and the controlling, threatening behavior of intimate terrorists. They also learn ways to get help for both types of relationship aggression and the program sets aside time for a professional from the local domestic violence outreach community to attend a class session in order to provide local, up-to-date information on getting help, and to make available a personal contact for the attendees.

One benefit of presenting Johnson's (1995) model of situational couple violence and intimate terrorism is that it makes the content on relationship aggression applicable to a wide audience. It also makes it real, in that those experiencing different contexts of aggression will hear about patterns and issues that are consistent with what they experience. In developing *Within My Reach*, the authors wanted to be sure that those experiencing situational couple violence did not wind up feeling left out of the discussion about aggression. If the curriculum had discussed aggression only in the context of one partner being a controlling batterer and the other being victim, or if it had considered aggression synonymous with "abuse", attendees who experience arguments-that-get-physical or who sometimes act aggressively themselves might have felt that the information was not relevant to them or based on common reality. By discussing both types and the range of associated behaviors, attendees can better understand that no aggression is acceptable, but that there may be different ways of addressing problems with relationship aggression, depending on the type.

The curriculum does not instruct participants to create a specific safety plan, but instead provides general information about safety planning and provides direct contact to local domestic violence shelters that can help participants make tailored safety plans if and when they need them. The reason for this approach is that a specific safety plan, if done outside of time when it is likely to be immediately implemented, may focus individuals on a plan that ultimately will not work well if their circumstances change.

In addition to teaching about aggression and coercive control, the middle section of the *Within My Reach* curriculum covers communication and conflict management skills. For example, they learn the Speaker-listener Technique, how to use it in different kinds of relationships, and how to take time outs when conflict escalates (see Markman et al., 2010 for more details on these communication skills). Because only one partner attends *Within My Reach* at a time, the curriculum also helps individuals consider ways to use these skills without the other person knowing them. Providers are also encouraged to give referrals to couple-based programs for those who would like to learn to use these skills side-by-side with their partners.

The last section of the curriculum focuses on other issues that can threaten the stability of a romantic relationship, such as problems related to commitment, infidelity, and co-parenting. It also provides discussion of ways to manage a co-parenting relationship with an ex-partner. Additionally, ideas on increasing social support and utilizing community resources are covered, which is likely to be beneficial to many participants, but especially those who may be trying to overcome structural barriers to leaving a relationship. Lack of social support has been identified as a risk factor for relationship aggression (O'Leary et al., 2007).

### Service-delivery model

*Within My Reach* is most often delivered in the same manner most other relationship education programs are: to a group, in a workshop or class format, with a mix of didactic material, group interaction, skills practice, and time for personal reflection. As such, the environment is educational; it is not a group therapy context. The size of the groups of attendees varies across settings and practitioners. The structure of the curriculum is such that it makes the most sense to deliver it in the sequence provided, but it is flexible in terms of how the 15 hours might be divided across classes. Some have offered two all-day workshops while others have weekly one-to-three hour classes.

The curriculum has been used in a variety of settings, such as a part of regular training programs in Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) offices, as well as through colleges, community centers, religious organizations, and prisons (both men's and women's). More generally, although the examples of relationships used are of couples in opposite-sex romantic relationships, the content of *Within My Reach* is applicable to individuals in both opposite and same-sex relationships as well as to non-romantic relationships, such as with other family members, friends, or co-workers.

Rhoades and Stanley (2009) provide a detailed discussion of recruitment and dissemination strategies for *Within My Reach*. As we point out, the recruitment models that have been most successful are ones that can integrate the curriculum into existing programs or recruitment streams. As examples, Florida State University offers the *Within My Reach* curriculum as part of a larger class on relationships that is offered to 1,000 students each semester (see Fincham, Stanley, & Rhoades, 2011) and Oklahoma's Department of Human Services provides the curriculum as part of their TANF orientation program.

Three-day trainings in *Within My Reach* are offered through PREP, Inc. ([www.prepinc.com](http://www.prepinc.com)), as are the instructor manuals, participant workbooks, and associated



presentation materials. Individuals interested in providing *Within My Reach* are required to attend training in the curriculum; besides this requirement, there are no specific qualifications necessary for becoming a *Within My Reach* provider. We tend to believe that being a good provider is based more on knowing the audience, having strong facilitation and rapport-building skills, and generally being interested in helping those attending than on specific education levels or certifications.

### Research on *Within My Reach*

Antle and colleagues (in press) carried out the first quantitative study on the effectiveness of *Within My Reach*. In this study, 202 individuals (76.7% women) took part in *Within My Reach* at a neighborhood center. They completed a pre-program assessment, post-program assessment, and six-month follow-up. Satisfaction with the program was high, with a mean of 4.46 on 5-point scale. Additionally, participants showed significant increases in knowledge about relationship skills, as measured by a scale developed for this study. Finally, the results indicated significant, positive change from pre-program to follow-up on communication quality and conflict management, as well as a trend toward a reduction in relationship aggression. The effect size (Cohen's *d*) for the change in aggression across the 6-month period was .29, indicating a small to medium effect, although it did not reach the conventional level of statistical significance (Antle et al., in press). However, the effect of the program on the reduction of aggression becomes significant at the one-year follow-up (Becky Antle, personal communication, August, 2009).

Additionally, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has funded a violence prevention study using *Within My Reach* as part of the David Olds' and colleagues' Nurse-Family Partnership Model (see Niolon et al. (2009) for a description). In that study, *Within My Reach* is delivered as a part of a larger program delivered in home visits by nurses to pregnant women with low-income levels. No outcome data have been published from that project, but the investigator reports that it has been very well received by the mothers being visited by public health nurses (Lynette Feder, personal communication, February, 2009).

Clearly, more research is needed on the effectiveness of *Within My Reach* and individual-oriented relationship education in general for the prevention of family violence. A next important step in examining its effectiveness is a randomized-controlled trial in which this curriculum is either compared to a no-treatment control group or to a different program. Given the curriculum's discussion of and proposed applicability to both intimate terrorism and situational couple violence, future research should include specific measures of these kinds of aggression. Given the strong links between relationship aggression and child abuse (Edleson, 1999), violence toward children and child outcomes should also be measured in future work. These limitations notwithstanding, we believe we have outlined several reasons why this kind of individual-oriented relationship education approach shows promise for preventing relationship aggression and ultimately reducing family violence.

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**Table 1***Within My Reach* Curriculum Overview

<b>Section Title</b>	<b>Content Description</b>
1. The State of Relationships Today	Overview of curriculum, basic facts about relationships in the United States
2. Healthy Relationships	Model of a healthy relationship presented
3. Sliding versus Deciding	Information on how to make healthy decisions in relationships, mate selection
4. Smart Love	Identifying healthy and unhealthy relationships and patterns, impact on children
5. Knowing Yourself First	Understanding family background and personality influences on relationships
6. Making Your Own Decisions	Applying decision-making framework, mate selection principles in one's own relationships, how decisions affect children
7. Dangerous Patterns in Relationships	Ways to identify poor conflict management strategies and aggression, how to get help
8. Where Conflict Begins	Model of how conflict escalates presented
9. Smart Communication	Time-out conflict management strategy presented
10. The Speaker Listener Technique	Active listening skills reviewed and practiced
11. Infidelity, Distrust, and Forgiveness	Discussion of specific problems in relationships
12. Commitment: Why it Matters to Adults and Children	Commitment theory and tools for identifying commitment presented
13. Stepfamilies and the Significance of Fathers	Guidelines for dealing with ex-partners and new partners in co-parenting
14. Making the Tough Decisions	Strategies to exit unhealthy or unsafe relationships
15. Reaching Into Your Future	Planning ahead to reach goals for relationships and parenting