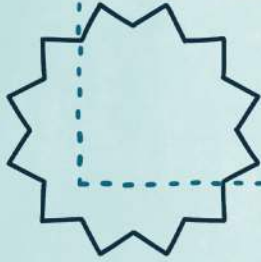


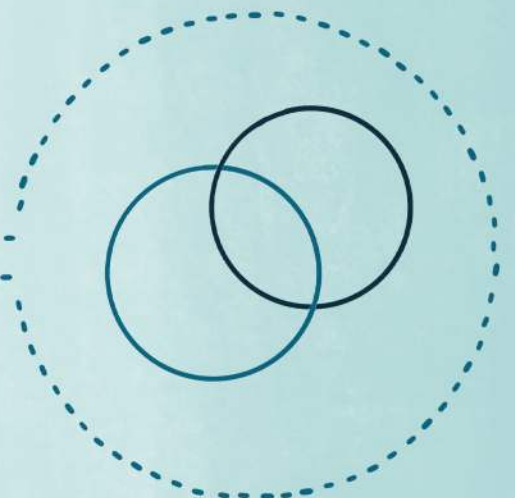
HOW TO LAUNCH A MARRIAGE
911 MINISTRY IN YOUR
CHURCH



MARRIAGE

911™

A DEFINITIVE GUIDE
TO HELPING COUPLES
THROUGH CRISIS



For information about Marriage 911, contact Focus on the Family (800) A-FAMILY – FocusOnTheFamily.com

To speak with a Focus on the Family counselor, call 1-855-771-HELP.

“All praise to the God ... of all healing counsel! He comes alongside us when we go through hard times, and before you know it, He brings us alongside someone else who is going through hard times so that we can be there for that person just as God was there for us.”

2 Corinthians 1:3-4 (MSG)

COUPLES IN CRISIS

The next time you step on stage – or greet church members – count the couples in your congregation. *One ... two ... three ... four.* Take another look at the fourth couple. You may not know it, but there's a real chance that this couple is facing significant issues in their marriage.

Research from Communio and the Barna Group found that regardless of denomination, 24% of married couples who are active members of a church report struggling in their marriage. And they're most likely to turn to you for help before going to a marriage counselor.

CAN YOU HELP THEM?

We get it. Ministry is challenging. As we've worked with pastors and churches, we hear a common theme about marriage ministry – *there aren't enough hours in my day to do it well.* Maybe that's where your church is today. You want to help couples but don't feel equipped to meet their needs. Maybe you don't have the resources to offer specialized counseling services, small groups for married couples, or in-person conferences. That's why we've created the *Marriage 911* program. *Marriage 911* works for any church. You can size it to fit your needs.

WE WANT TO HELP YOU

At Focus on the Family, we believe marriage should be honored by all (Hebrews 13:4). We want to help you and your leadership team meet the needs of hurting couples in your church. *Marriage 911* is a 16-week marriage mentoring program designed to connect mature Christian couples with couples in crisis. It's biblically based and teaches God's design for a healthy, thriving marriage. It's also built on concepts used in our [Hope Restored Marriage Intensives](#) and *9 Lies That Will Destroy Your Marriage* by Dr. Robert Paul and Dr. Greg Smalley.

During the program, a mentor couple and a crisis couple meet for 16 consecutive weeks. The weekly 1½ - to 2-hour sessions combine homework, review, and discussion time. For the first eight weeks, the husband meets alone with the male mentor while the wife meets alone with the female mentor. Splitting up the crisis couple allows individuals to focus on personal responsibility and self-care before introducing core marriage content. The separation also keeps the situation from feeling like marital counseling.

The crisis couple and mentor couple come back together for the final eight sessions. Crisis couples then learn how to deal with conflict, communication, teamwork, and connection. For details about each week's lessons, review the *Marriage 911 Mentor Training Handbook*.

Thank you for choosing *Marriage 911*. We're praying for you and your team as you start this program and help couples thrive in Christ.

“Marriage should be honored by all.”
Hebrews 13:4 (NIV)

HOW TO LAUNCH MARRIAGE 911

Launching *Marriage 911* in your church can be a powerful way to support and assist couples facing challenges and difficulties in their marriage. Here are some steps you can take to successfully launch the program:

STEP 1: Identify the need. Determine the need for a *Marriage 911* program in your church. When you see the struggles they face, you can understand, align, and prioritize your marriage ministry and then remind them of the need for strong, Christ-centered relationships. By doing so, you're living out Proverbs 27:23: *"Be sure to know the condition of your flocks, give careful attention to your herds."*

STEP 2: Use the following mission statement to guide you as your church engages in this program. *"We desire to walk alongside married couples in crisis to provide hope, help them reignite their love for God, and build a marriage in which both people are thrilled with the direction their relationship is headed."*

Step 3: Honor marriage. Hebrews 13:4 tells us that "marriage should be honored by all." Churches need strong marriages. The world needs to see more Christ-honoring marriages. For information on how to honor marriage and build a comprehensive church-wide marriage ministry, download Focus on the Family's free e-book, [*Building a Thriving Church Marriage Ministry*](#).

Launching a *Marriage 911* program takes time and effort. But with the right strategy, policies, and a dedicated team, the program can become a valuable resource for couples in crisis and a way to support and strengthen marriages within your congregation.

We're encouraged that you and your church recognize the importance of addressing marital problems and that you're taking steps to help couples in need. We hope more churches will follow your example and prioritize marriage by providing resources and support for couples who are struggling.

May God richly bless you and your team for your faithfulness, care, and sacrifice.

STEPS FOR PASTORS AND STAFF

STEP 1: Recruit and train a lead mentoring couple. Healthy churches involve healthy couples. *Marriage 911* is a tool to train lay leaders in effective marriage ministry. To reach this goal, you'll need to recruit a lead mentoring couple to oversee the program at your church. We recommend the following:

- A. Define the qualifications.** Identify qualifications and qualities that are important for a lead ministry couple. Consider their marital experience, communication skills, organization skills, empathy, ability to provide wise counsel and passion for couples in crisis.

Because the *Marriage 911* lead couple will influence many other couples in your church, we recommend looking for a husband and wife who display:

- Spiritual maturity.
- Regular church attendance and participation.
- Growth and health in their marriage.
- Transparency about their growth and struggles as a couple.
- Team leadership skills.
- Strong communication skills.
- Strong administrative skills and a willingness to track down details.
- Emotional intelligence: empathy, discernment, willingness to keep confidences.
- A passion for helping couples in crisis.
- A teachable spirit and one that is willing to stay under authority.
- A willingness to be interrupted and to accept that those interruptions come from God.

- B. Communicate the opportunity.** Spread the word about the *Marriage 911* program and the need for a lead couple to oversee it. Promote it in your weekly texts or bulletins, in announcements from the stage, and by contacting potential candidates directly.

- C. Screen the candidates.** Review the Marriage Ministry questionnaire the potential lead mentor couples completed to determine if they meet the qualifications. In the interview, include asking how they have handled a marriage problem or crisis.

- D. Train the couple.** Once you have selected a lead couple, provide the necessary training and resources needed for the role. We've created a series of training videos to explain *Marriage 911* and prepare leaders for some of the challenges they'll face. Download the videos using the QR code provided on the inside cover of the *Marriage 911 Training Guide*.
- E. Evaluate.** Evaluate the program from time to time to measure its effectiveness.

If, after your search, you haven't yet found the right couple, consider a long-term training approach. Start a marriage class or small group that is led by a pastor or staff couple. As you observe couples in the class, look for those who are committed to the biblical model of a Christ-centered marriage and a vision for the church and the community. Strong marriage and strong churches don't happen overnight. Give God time to work.

Step 2: Dedicate resources. What resources will you need to build an ongoing, sustainable Marriage 911 ministry? Do resources like budget, staff time and church calendars reflect your commitment? Consider these categories as well:

- **Spiritual Resources:** Calling and prayer.
- **People Resources:** Volunteer mentors.
- **Financial Resources:** Develop a budget for the Marriage 911 program. Outline the expenses you'll need to cover as well as the resources you'll need to acquire. Determine how much the church will cover for these materials and how much the mentees will pay for their workbooks. It is highly recommended that the mentees pay some fee for their workbooks - it helps the mentee couple to have skin in the game.
- **Technological Resources:** Where will the intake form be housed? (On the church's website, Google Forms, survey tool, etc.) How will the Lead Mentor Couple be notified of if/when a crisis couple completes the intake form?

STEPS FOR LEAD MENTOR COUPLE

Step 1: Engage the senior pastor. The senior pastor's support and endorsement lend credibility and legitimacy to *Marriage 911* and encourage couples to participate as mentors and mentees. The senior pastor also has access to resources that can help the program succeed, such as funding, facilities, and staff. Without the senior pastor's support, the *Marriage 911* program struggles to gain traction and achieve its goals. Involve your senior pastor in the early planning stages and ask them to help by doing three things:

- **Preach, teach, and proclaim** the importance of marriage and healthy relationships.
- **Lead by example.** Encourage your pastor to make marriage a priority.
- **Provide an environment that nurtures and grows healthy marriages** by being transparent about their marriage challenges and talking about times they've sought help. Pastors may also invite couples to the pulpit to share marriage testimonies. Transparency creates a safe environment and encourages hurting couples to ask for help.

STEP 2: Recruit and train mentor couples. As the Lead Mentor Couple, it is your responsibility to identify and recruit mature couples who have a strong, healthy marriage and are willing to serve as mentors. In addition to a healthy, Christ-centered marriage, the ideal *Marriage 911* mentor has a growing relationship with Jesus Christ, attends church regularly, is available – and has the heart – to champion godly marriages, and is willing to follow through with the 16-week commitment. Note: You can evaluate potential *Marriage 911* mentors by having them fill out the *Marriage 911* Mentor Questionnaire. (Included in the resources section of this e-book.)

The *Marriage 911* program provides training guides for each mentor couple, training videos, and video FAQs led by licensed Christian counselors.

Mentor couples must complete the four-to-six-hour video-based training program. In addition, lead mentors and mentor couples are welcome to contact Focus on the Family for a consultation with a [licensed, Christian counselor](#) if they need help while working with mentor couples. Contact Focus on the Family at (800) A-Family or visit us at FocusOnTheFamily.com.

- A. **Support.** Be available to take calls from mentors and mentees. Check in with mentor couples regularly. Provide encouragement. Check that the mentoring sessions are going well. Remind mentors of this truth when mentoring couples: “Your responsibility is to be faithful and obey God’s leading. God is responsible for the outcome.”
- B. **Screen the candidates.** Review the Marriage Ministry questionnaire to determine if the proposed lead mentors meet the qualifications. In the interview, ask how they have handled a marriage problem or crisis.

STEP 3: Review policies and procedures. The *Marriage 911 Training Guide* contains these guidelines in Parts 3, 4, and 5. Make sure mentors are trained to follow these procedures that outline the responsibilities of mentors and mentees, confidentiality guidelines, and other important considerations for the program.

One of the most important policies in this program is our domestic violence policy:

“Focus on the Family is dedicated to bringing healing and restoration to couples who are struggling in their marriage. But God’s design for marriage never included abuse, violence, or coercive control. Even emotional abuse can bruise or severely harm a person’s heart, mind, and soul. We define abuse in marriage as behavior designed to gain or maintain power and control over a spouse, using physical, sexual, emotional, economic, or psychological actions or threats of actions that influence another person. This includes any behaviors that frighten, intimidate, terrorize, manipulate, hurt, humiliate, blame, injure, or wound someone.

Violence against a spouse is never justified and is sinful; often, it is a crime as well. We believe that this type of severe and ongoing mistreatment is never God’s intent for marriage. Abuse in any relationship or under any circumstance is never condoned in the Bible. We urge the victim to seek safety, adopt a zero-tolerance policy toward the abuse, and consult with their pastor and a Christian counselor to determine the next steps. Visit Focus on the Family’s [“Help for Abusive Relationships”](#) web page to find resources and a path to safety.

STEP 4: Implement the following intake process. When a couple requests *Marriage 911* mentoring, the lead mentor couple follows up within 24 hours. This highlights one of the most important aspects of the *Marriage 911* program – the speed at which couples can access help. Most licensed Christian counselors or intensive marriage counseling programs like *Hope Restored* have a waitlist for new clients.

Pastors and church staff are often overwhelmed with counseling requests. However, *Marriage 911* is an “emergency room” for couples. As such, it requires a “quick response team” that can answer emails and phone calls within 24 hours of receiving a couple’s request. We can’t stress enough the need for a quick response. We’ve learned that by the time a couple reaches out for help, their marriage struggle has turned into a crisis. And when they call for help, they need it right away.

When you make the first phone call to the mentee couple - follow these guidelines:

1. **Plan to respond within 24 hours of receiving the request.** When you respond to a couple’s request, keep these three things in mind:
 - A. **Always pray before calling.** Ask God to guide you during the conversation. Ask Him to help you listen – and hear – the need.
 - B. **Set boundaries.** Keep initial communications female-to-female and male-to-male. While it may feel “old fashioned,” remember that couples in crisis are looking for someone – sometimes anyone – who will listen and help. The male/male and female/female connections provide safeguards for both the mentor couple and the crisis couple. If the wife calls for help, the female lead will connect with her. The husband should then call the male lead.
 - C. **Respond to inquiries twice.** If there is no answer either time, wait for the couple to call back. If the couple doesn’t respond after the second phone call, don’t try to talk them into being a part of the program. *Marriage 911* doesn’t work unless the couple takes the initiative. In some cases, couples have returned calls a year after their initial request. On the second call, if no answer, leave a voicemail expressing that you don’t want to bother them, so you won’t call again, but you’re there if they decide to pursue requesting help for their marriage.
2. **Require both the husband and wife to commit to *Marriage 911*.** The mentoring request isn’t official until both spouses agree to the 16-week mentoring program. Spouses must show initiative and willingness to commit to the program.

3. **Use your discretion when choosing a mentor if only one spouse commits to *Marriage 911*.** As a lead couple, you can choose a specific mentor to work with a single mentee. However, if you do not assign the mentor couple to another couple in crisis during the same period. For instance, if the wife mentors a woman in a crisis marriage, let the two of them complete the 16-week process, and then when the mentor cycle is complete, reassign the mentor couple to another couple in crisis.
4. **Discuss childcare and intake information.** Childcare is a necessity. *Marriage 911* is a time for both spouses to focus on their marriage without distraction. Also, during the initial conversation, use the intake form in the resources section of this guide to gather information to share (confidentially) with the assigned mentor couple.
5. **Assign a mentor couple.** Once the crisis couple commits to the 16-week program, assign a mentor couple.
6. **Ask mentors to call the crisis couple within 24 hours of receiving the assignment.** Mentors can set up an introductory meeting with the crisis couple, discuss program expectations, and give out workbooks.

Step 5: Launch the program. Once you've done the necessary preparation, launch your *Marriage 911* program with a clear plan that includes the following:

- Training and orientation for the mentoring team.
- The intake process for mentee couples.
- Processes to match mentors and mentees.
- Guidelines for communication.

Step 6: Evaluate and adjust. "Inspect what you expect." Evaluate your *Marriage 911* program and adjust as needed to improve its impact. Encourage and incorporate feedback from mentors and mentees so that the program continues to meet their needs. Celebrate success! And don't fear failures – use them as learning and growth opportunities.

The two greatest forces in evangelism are a healthy church and a healthy marriage. The two are interdependent. You can't have one without the other.

It's the healthy marriage, however, which is the 'front lines weapon.' The Christian family in a community is the ultimate evangelistic tool. It's the old story: When love is seen, the message is heard."

Gary J. Oliver, Ph.D.

MARRIAGE 911
RESOURCES



LEAD COUPLE QUALIFICATIONS & RESPONSIBILITIES

Provided by Karen and R.G. Yallaly, Marriage 911 Lead Couple,
Woodland Hills Family Church.

QUALIFICATIONS

- Be a Christ follower with a solid faith and a mature walk with God.
- Be a member of this church and a regular attendee.
- Be actively involved in a life group/small group.
- Desire to serve and have a passion for marriage.
- Be known as a person of good moral standing in the church and community.
- Have people skills.
- Have a strong, growing, Christ-centered marriage.
- Be able to facilitate marriage classes.
- Be an advocate for marriage.
- Be one year past the resolution of a marriage crisis.

RESPONSIBILITIES

Communicate with couples and assign mentors.

- Respond to all *Marriage 911* participation requests within 24 hours.
- Be able to explain the program and its faith-based content.
- Explain that *Marriage 911* is a 16-week commitment that includes weekly reading and homework.
- Explain (and uphold) confidentiality. If you or your mentors break confidence with the mentee couple, it compromises the entire *Marriage 911* ministry.
- Decide how much mentee couples pay for workbooks. We encourage churches to charge at least a minimum (\$20) so that the mentee couple has “skin in the game.”

RESPONSIBILITIES (Continued)

- Meet one-on-one (men with men, women with women) in a public place for the first eight weeks and then together as couples for the final eight weeks.
- Offer hope.

INTERVIEW POTENTIAL MENTORS

(Ask these questions)

- What challenges have you faced in your marriage? How did you work through it?
 - What is the greatest strength you bring to your marriage?
 - What do you want to gain from this experience as a mentor?
 - How could God draw you closer to Him through this experience?
 - Are you willing and able to meet the criteria for *Marriage 911* mentors?
1. **After the interview, give the couple a copy of the *Marriage 911* materials to review.** Ask them to read it thoroughly and complete the homework before becoming a mentor.
 2. **Learn the *Marriage 911* manual and *Marriage 911* training materials** so that you can teach the materials to new mentors.
 3. **Lead team meetings as needed.** Encourage your mentors and show your appreciation for them.
 4. **Be available to answer mentors' questions, help them, and encourage them.** Remind them (or help them) to connect with Christian counselors if a mentee is dealing with abuse or addictions.
 5. **Teach your mentors the following (and lead by example):**
 - Call the mentee couple within 24 hours of receiving the assignment.
 - Be on time for meetings. Don't cancel.
 - Be prepared to discuss each week's lesson.
 - Continue to grow your marriage by reading at least one marriage book or attending one marriage conference a year.
 - Pray daily for your lead mentor couple and the entire mentor team.

7. **Keep records of all assignments.** Note when a couple completes the 16-week mentoring program or when they stop attending. If a couple drops out, ask the mentors to provide a brief email to document the date and situation.
8. **Give your team information** about what to do if they encounter couples dealing with abuse or addictions.
9. **Mentor a couple as God leads.** God will provide for your team!

MARRIAGE 911

MENTOR QUESTIONNAIRE

Name: _____ Phone: _____

Email: _____

1. Are you a member of this church? Yes
 No
 Joining Soon
2. Do you know your spiritual gifts? Yes. (Please list below)
 No.
3. In what other areas do you serve at this church?
4. Are you involved in other community ministry?
5. How long have you been a Christian?
6. Please share your personal story of how you became a Christian.

MENTOR QUESTIONNAIRE (Continued)

7. What do you do to continue to develop your relationship with Christ?
8. How long have you been married?
9. If remarried, how long?
10. What do you do to keep your marriage growing and alive?
11. Why are you interested in serving in the marriage ministry? What do you have to bring to this ministry?
12. What experiences do you have in working in a marriage ministry? Please explain.

Marriage Ministry Use Only:

Reviewed by: _____

Date: _____

Notes: _____

MARRIAGE 911

INTAKE FORM

LEAD MENTOR: Use this form during your first phone call/connection with a couple in crisis.

Requesting Couple (Names): _____

Phone Number (Spouse 1): _____ **Email:** _____

Phone Number (Spouse 2): _____ **Email:** _____

Date Called: _____ **Follow Up Call:** _____

Church Information: Attends here
 Attends elsewhere
 Does not attend church

Years Married: _____

First Marriage
 Remarried

Children: Yes
 No

Reason(s) for requesting Marriage 911 mentors?

INTAKE FORM (Continued)

Assigned to: _____

Marriage 911 Start Date: _____

Marriage 911 Completion Date: _____

Additional Information/Mentor Notes: