

ESALEN INSTITUTE CONTINUING EDUCATION
MFT/LCSW/LPCC/LEP (CAMFT)

Leader Name/s: Warren Farrell, Ph.D.

Workshop Title: Couples' Communication Retreat

Our inability to handle personal criticism from loved ones is a common Achilles' heel. The more deeply we are in love, the harder it is to handle. Soon, couples feel they are walking on eggshells, unable to express themselves honestly, and the love fades. Raising children and raising money magnifies the problems even as those problems become the reason couples stay together. The result? Couples often remain legally married but psychologically divorced—in a minimum-security-prison marriage.

The biggest culprit in this dynamic is defensiveness. Active listening, a good solution, is rarely used. Warren Farrell developed Cinematic Immersion, a method that enables couples to actively listen to their partner without feeling defensive. Couples combine this with learning to create a "Conflict Free Zone" and the discipline of mutual appreciation. The combination allows passion to be reignited without sacrificing stability.

Couples are then shown how to apply what they've learned to other family members and to work colleagues. To sustain the process, participants are invited to two free group follow-up phone calls per year.

This workshop is for couples and clinicians. A couple is any two people who have a history together (such as parent-child, siblings, married or divorced parents) and who want a future with improved communication. Clinicians first learn to practice handling personal criticism without becoming defensive in their own relationship, and then receive all the tools and handouts to allow them to train their clients to be able to do the same.

Recommended reading: Farrell, *Women Can't Hear What Men Don't Say* and Gottman, *The Seven Principles of Making Marriage Work*.

APA TOPIC

1. Families and couples (16)

COURSE OBJECTIVES

1. Practice active listening so that it is safer for the family member being criticized to experience
2. Explain to couples and families seven mindsets that allow them to handle personal criticism without becoming defensive
3. Recognize the five distinctions between appreciating a partner effectively and ineffectively
4. Apply the five appreciation distinctions and seven mindsets in exercises with client's partner
5. Demonstrate the discipline of love in dyad form in six workshop exercises so that it may be replicated with clients in their family and work life
6. Design a post-workshop communication plan that a client can integrate into a busy life

COURSE CONTENT CITATIONS

J. Dan Rothwell, *In the Company of Others: An Introduction to Communication* (N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 2010)

[J Consult Clin Psychol](#). 2016 Feb;84(2):156-66. doi: 10.1037/ccp0000056. Epub 2015 Oct 26.

Effects of relationship education on couple communication and satisfaction: A randomized controlled trial with low-income couples.

[Williamson HC](#)¹, [Altman N](#)², [Hsueh J](#)², [Bradbury TN](#)¹.

.....
[Mater Sociomed](#). 2015 Aug;27(4):286-90. doi: 10.5455/msm.2015.27.286-290.

Couples Communication Skills and Anxiety of Pregnancy: A Narrative Review.

[Malary M](#)¹, [Shahhosseini Z](#)², [Pourasghar M](#)³, [Hamzehgardeshi Z](#)⁴.

.....
[J Fam Psychol](#). 2009 Apr;23(2):203-14. doi: 10.1037/a0015211.

Investigating the effects of marriage and relationship education on couples' communication skills: a meta-analytic study.

[Blanchard VL](#)¹, [Hawkins AJ](#), [Baldwin SA](#), [Fawcett EB](#).

[J Marital Fam Ther](#). 2015 Apr;41(2):236-50. doi: 10.1111/jmft.12052. Epub 2014 Jun 9.

Together - a couples' program to improve communication, coping, and financial management skills: development and initial pilot-testing.

[Falconier MK](#)¹.

John Gottman, What makes love last? (N.Y.: Three Rivers Press, 2012)

Marshall Rosenberg, Nonviolent communication: A Language of Life (Encinitas, Ca.: PuddleDancer Press, 3rd Edition, 2015)

Warren Farrell, Women Can't Hear What Men Don't Say (N.Y.: Berkely, 1999), p. 1-87.

Course Syllabus

- Couples share qualities that attracted them to their partner, and challenges they face.
- Couples complete questionnaire on personal defenses, share with partners.
- Couples learn why it is natural to become defensive when criticized, but dysfunctional for love.
- Couples learn why there is such a perception gap between the criticizer and criticized.
- Couples learn how love creates vulnerability, why anger is vulnerability's mask, and how they will learn to address the underlying anger so it is safe to love more deeply.
- Couples learn the incentives for sustaining love, such as being appreciated.
- Couples learn, then practice, the art and discipline of appreciating their partner.
- Couples learn to create a "Conflict Free Zone" in exchange for a weekly "Caring and Sharing Time"
- Couples learn, then practice, "energy shifting" and other methods of sustaining that conflict free zone even when conflicts arise.

- Couples learn how to prepare themselves for the “Caring and Sharing Time.”
- Couples learn how to alter their natural state of defensiveness by immersing themselves in “six mindsets” as the core of the “Caring and Sharing Time.”
- Couples prepare to keep themselves emotionally safe, learning how to stop the process at any time. Couples practice doing that.
- Couples then choose a real-life issue to discuss. Partners rotate preparing to be heard by sharing appreciations, then immersing themselves in the six mindsets. Real issues are shared. Partners share what they heard, and what was missed and distorted. Process continues until each person feels heard.
- Couples learn, then practice, a creative method of brainstorming to create behavior changes that are viable for both partners.
- Couples review notes and hand-outs and share with small, then large group their most-important take-aways. All participants hear each others’ take-aways.
- Couples learn what it takes to sustain what they’ve practiced during the weekend. This includes putting their first “Caring and Sharing Time” on their calendar, and our choosing the first two times for their two annual free group follow-up phone calls.
- Couples learn how to create realistic commitments and renewal of vows based on what they’ve learned.
- Couples participate in a closing ceremony.

This course meets the qualifications for 10 hours of continuing education credit for LMFTs, LCSWs, LPCCs, and/or LEPs as required by the California Board of Behavioral Sciences. Esalen is an approved provider of continuing education by the California Association of Marriage and Family Therapists .

Esalen Institute maintains responsibility for this program and its content. You may contact us at CE@esalen.org. We encourage you to be in touch with our office with any grievances in a timely manner.