



Planning for Children: Helping Couples Get on the Same Page About If or When to Have More Children

SUMMARY

Unexpectedly bringing a new child into the family presents a serious challenge to low-income couples who are trying to attain family and economic stability. Even so, few, if any, healthy relationship or marriage education programs include a focus on pregnancy planning and prevention. *Planning for Children: Helping Couples Get on the Same Page about If or When to Have More Children* was created to fill that void and provide a much needed supplement to comprehensive relationship and/or marriage education programs. The overall goals of the module are to 1) promote the importance of timing pregnancies in order to reach family goals and achieve family stability and 2) enable couples to create a shared vision about if or when to have another child and how to use contraception to achieve their vision. The module consists of three 2-hour sessions, which includes an optional introductory session on sexuality.

Planning for Children was developed collaboratively in 2009 by the Center for Urban Families, The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy, the Center on Children and Families at the Brookings Institution, and the Annie E. Casey Foundation. Pamela Wilson, an independent consultant, was selected to author the module because of her background and experience with the target audience, relationship education programs, and family planning.

Unplanned pregnancy has serious consequences for the parents involved, as well as for their children. The importance of a curriculum like *Planning for Children* is shown by the fact that among couples in a cohabiting relationship who had an unplanned pregnancy resulting in a birth, one-third split up within two years of the child's birth. In addition, a host of studies show that adequate spacing of births contributes significantly to children's development.

Although specifically tailored for low-income couples, the basic information and activities in the module are also relevant for couples from higher socio-economic backgrounds. Unplanned pregnancies occur in every income bracket and they can have powerful consequences for couple relationships and children. Surprisingly, more than one-quarter of pregnancies among married couples are unplanned. Even more surprising, the rates are twice as high among cohabiting couples. Facilitators can adapt the materials to reflect their population.

The module was carefully developed based on available information and experience, as well as valuable input from experts, program staff, and participants at the Center for Urban Families. However, it has not yet been evaluated and, as such, should be considered an early version. We hope to do some assessment in 2010. In the meantime, we are making this version available to the field and welcome feedback from those who use it.

The module is available free of charge in a convenient downloadable format at www.TheNationalCampaign.org/PlanningForChildren