

Relationship Education in Norway

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PREP communication workshops for couples and professionals

“We are always parents” –Cooperating WELL ENOUGH after relationship disruption

Counselling and communication courses for single couples



Samlivssenteret

Families are changing

Since 1950 until 2006:

- Fewer getting married
- Numbers of marriages ending in divorce have increased rapidly
- 2006 – 2008:
 - Increase in the number of marriages
 - Decrease in the number of divorces and separations
- We have to go back to 2001 to find a lower divorce rate than in 2001!

Why this sudden decrease in the number of divorces and separations, and why now?

There are reasons to believe that the support, development and implementation of relationship education programmes 1994-2008 on behalf of the Norwegian State Authorities have been an important contribution to this changing scenery.

Cultural context

1950`s: The house wife family

1970`s: The triple working woman

1980`s: 75 % of divorces initiated by women. Reported main reason: Experienced lack of equality

1990`s: Men`s participation in the family considered a key prerequisite for attaining goal of fair distribution of domestic work. Home making becoming a joint project and significant as glue in egalitarian relationships.

Egalitarian couples

- Both working full time
- High educational levels
- Ideal of romantic love as the melting together of two autonomous and equal life projects
- High level of individualization in accordance with Giddens' vision of a pure relation – a relation produced not of dependency, but existing as confluent love

- Widespread agreement in Norway: One should form unions on basis of love and sustain relationships on basis of quality.
- The quality of family relationships has traditionally been seen as belonging within a private sphere withdrawn from state business, other in cases of severe dysfunction, such as child abuse etc.

From the 1970`s on:

Interweaving of the political and the private in new ways:

- ▶ Growing interest in preventive psychology: State interventions have emerged towards non-clinical populations intending to enhance healthy family relationships – maternity education, parental guidance programmes, mandatory mediating in case of parental separation etc
- ▶ Policy encouraging equality in the family (From 2005 "Department of Children and Equality Affairs")
- ▶ Policy encouraging and supporting the development and implementation of relationship education programs

The role of the state authorities:

- a) Placing relationship education on the political agenda
- b) Funding the development and implementation of different relationship education programmes
- a) Since 2004 developing, implementing and running public relationship education programmes

a) Placing relationship education on the political agenda

Since 1994: Steady growth in interest for relationship education both on the political level, among professionals and in the Norwegian population.

1994: scheme established whereby grants are provided for relationship education programmes

Aim: Provide couples with tools that may help in sustaining and improving their relationship.

Main argument: It is beneficial for children to have parents who can communicate well and solve conflicts, independently of which direction the relationship should take on in the future.

The political agenda

The work aiming at putting relationship education on the political agenda has been a success.

In fact it has been a success to such an extent that it created a political drama in the parliament when the Department of Children and Equality Affairs had removed the grant scheme from the state budget in 2006.

b)Funding the development and implementation of relationship education programmes

From 1994 on – different organisations and local authorities have been invited to apply for grants and participate in relationship education efforts

Three examples:

- 1) Translation, adaption and implementation of the PREP programme
- 2) Development and implementation of the programme "We are always parents – cooperating WELL ENOUGH after relationship disruption"
- 3) Development of the Rainbow project – relationship education for non-western minority families

1. The PREP programme

Two phases:

- 1) Translation and adaption in cooperation with the founders in Denver 1998 (Howard Markman and Scott Stanley)
- 2) Contextualisation of the PREP programme in a Scandinavian theoretical framework in order to show that the American programme is compatible to Scandinavian traditions (2004).

Linguistic adaption

- "Premarital education" – would miss the target because 90 % of new marriages involve a period of cohabitation. Now: "PREP Communication course for couples".
- To avoid being interpreted as "moralistic" and "reactionary" – PREP promoted as a tool of *enhancing relationships* more than a tool for preventing divorce.

The book "Fighting for your marriage"
(Markman, Stanley and Blumberg, 1994)
is in Norway called "The book of living together"
(Samlivsboken), and in Denmark "Fight for
love" (Kæmp for kærligheden).

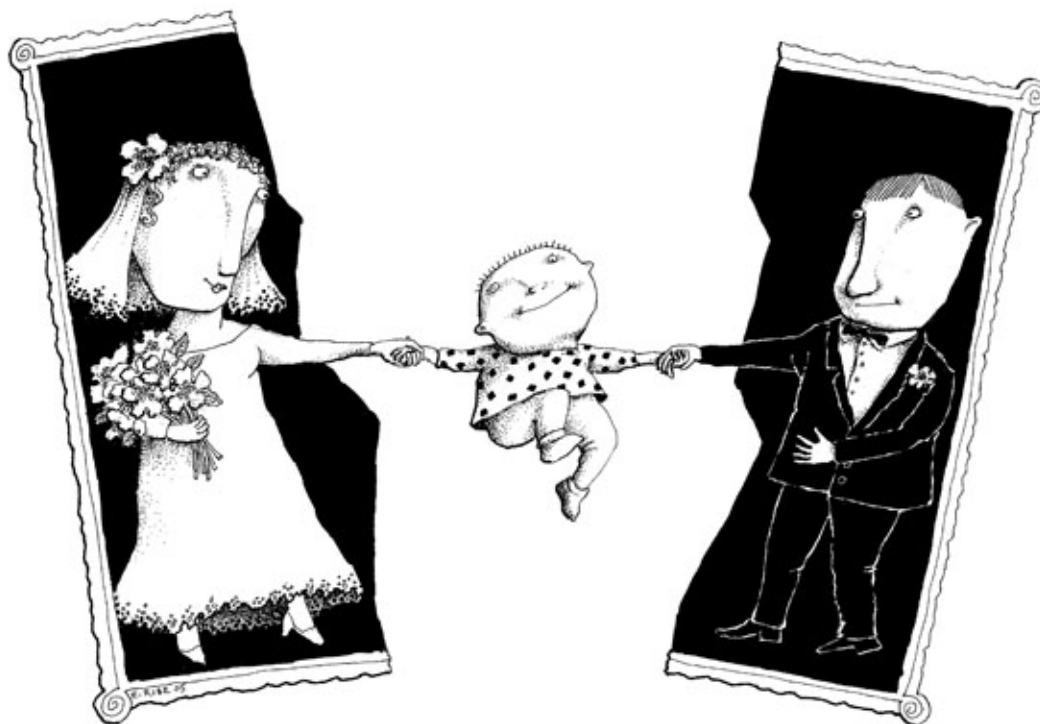
Terms for "lasting relationships" have replaced
the term "marriage" throughout the book.

2) We are always parents

Help parents free themselves from their ex-partner in order to reduce conflict and cooperate WELL ENOUGH about their children:

- coping with their own difficult feelings
- separating the relationship between parent and child from the relationship between them and their ex-partner
- Becoming more aware of their own ways of acting and communicating
- Reconciling with and learn from the past, in order to be able to focus on the life they wish to live in the future, together with their children

FORTSATT FORELDRE



GODT NOK samarbeid etter samlivsbrudd

3) The Rainbow project

Aim: Prevent relationship problems in families of a non-western minority background, and help families adjust to their new society.

Themes:

1. Meeting Norway
2. Family Life
3. Norwegian rules and regulations that affect family life
4. Growing up in two cultures

3. Government-driven relationship education programs

1. "What about us?" – a relationship education program with parents of disabled children as a target group
2. "Living Together Nicely" – offered to parents the first year after their first child is born.

Living Together Nicely

Aim:

"To stabilize and strengthen couple relationships among parents who recently have had their first child, and to prevent relationship disruption in families where children are involved" (From the workbook of the program).

Themes:

1. Changes in the couple relationship when the first child is born
2. Communication
3. Conflicts and conflict handling
4. Happiness and vitality

Why public relationship education programs?

Arguments given in political documents:

- "Couple relationships are public health"
- "Sustainable and stable couple relationships are basically concerning the life situation and growth of children"

In the workbook for participants:

- "Children need parents with good and stable relationships"

Increasing media interest

Weekly columns in all the biggest newspapers

Important as a means to show that couple problems are common, and that experiencing difficulties within the family is normal.

Easier to ask for therapeutic help and to attend relationship education workshops?

Decrease in the number of divorces and separations – a move towards the enlightenment ideal of “true humanity”?

In this tradition the political and the educational – the collective and the individual - was treated as connected entities, and the idea of “true humanity” included ideas of recognition, respect, equality and communicative democracy.

Cultural analyst Hilde Danielsen:

"When the state lifts our bedroom blankets it is
for the best of our children"

But:

"Should the bedroom life of couples really be the
business of the state?"