



Engage Youth: Girls, Boys, &/or Mixed groups – “Honor the Institution of Marriage”

This interactive session is tailored specifically for the youth – whether girls alone, boys, or mixed youth groups – providing them with thoughtful opportunities to understand EM and its consequences. How to engage different subgroups of youth will depend on local circumstances, but key messages remain constant. The session should be facilitated by a faith leader, an elder, or any other member of the community who would normally be responsible for leading the regular youth group sessions. Because this topic is particularly sensitive, there are two main activities outlined in the module, one for children 14 and younger, and one for young adults ages 15-18.

In preparation for the youth group meeting, read the scriptural support elements in Module 2 to identify verses that you may want to use as part of the lesson, and review the EM narrative flipchart for your faith, featuring the ____ family (Christian) or the ____ family (Muslim)*. For information about EM, refer to the “EM Information Sheet” in **Module 2: “Teach Yourself”**.

***NOTE: Please give the family in your faith-specific EM flipchart narrative an appropriate local name!**

Activity

Creating a Safe Space – Before You Begin

Suggested Time: 15 minutes

Before you begin your first workshop with a group, it is important to establish what is called “**safe space.**” Safe space doesn’t just happen – it’s up to you to take a proactive role in creating an atmosphere that will best support the growth and learning of each participant. Here’s a quick activity that will help establish safe space:

- 2) Explain to participants that the workshop(s) they’ll be taking part in are not just about you teaching them, but rather about everyone discussing difficult issues and learning from one another. Say that in order to do this, we need to have a space in which each person feels comfortable and safe.
- 3) Ask the group, ‘How can we create a safe space?’ or ‘What do you need in order to feel comfortable with everyone in this group?’ Write the various answers that you hear on a large piece of paper or on a chalkboard so that everyone can see them.
- 4) Once you have received answers from as many women as would like to contribute, read everything that is written on the paper aloud, and ask the group if they think anything should be added. If not, ask the group if they are willing to commit to upholding what is written as group standards for the workshop.
- 5) Have participants raise their hands if they promise to make this a safe, comfortable space for everyone!

KEY TERM:

SAFE SPACE refers to a cooperative learning environment in which all participants feel comfortable and safe to fully participate. A safe space is one in which every person respects the ideas and thoughts of each other and people are supportive of each other’s growth and learning.

It doesn’t have to end there! You can always come back to your safe space agreement. If your group ever meets again, you can remind people of their commitments at subsequent sessions. Additionally, if there is ever a difficult conversation or tension in the group, you can remind people of their safe space agreement and hold people to the intentions and norms that they set.

Youth Workshop

Materials needed: The accompanying illustrated flipchart with the family narration for the EM flipchart activity, and any materials that the facilitator deems necessary based on what main activity they would like to engage the participants in (blackboard, paper and pens, etc.). This may vary depending on the age and literacy level of the group.

Please read through the instructions to the EM flipchart activity before this lesson to familiarize yourself with each picture, the narrative, and the discussion questions involved.

Topic: “Honor the Institution of Marriage.”

FACILITATOR SPEAKING GUIDE: Welcome, and thank you for joining me! Today, we are going to discuss marriage, and more specifically, how we can truly honor marriage as a gift from God. One way we can do this in our community is to avoid early marriage, or marriage before one is mature enough to handle its responsibilities – this can often only happen when we are above the age of 18. Before we begin, let’s play a quick game.

Initial icebreaker: “Blind Leader.”

This is an exercise that emphasizes trust of your partner. One partner is blindfolded, and the other partner must stand at one end of the room, and lead the blindfolded to another corner by calling out directions like, “move to your left!” “walk forward!”. This activity engages two participants who may not know each other and builds a quick sense of trust among the group.

Discussion Questions: How did you feel about that activity? Did you enjoy it? What parts were challenging? How do you think this might be like marriage, in any way?

FACILITATOR SPEAKING GUIDE: Marriage is a gift from God, and we should not enter into it lightly. It is meant to be a partnership based on mutual love and respect – anything else is displeasing to God. God wants us all to wait until we are mentally, emotionally, financially, physically, and spiritually prepared for marriage, so that we can treat our husband or wife with the love and respect they deserve, and that God wants us to show!

Emphasize the following two key messages:

- 1) Marriage is a gift from God, meant to be enjoyed as a partnership based on mutual, unconditional, equal love.
- 2) Like everything, marriage has its proper time: we must be mentally, emotionally, financially, physically, and spiritually prepared for marriage.

Supporting verse: “Let the husband render unto the wife due benevolence; and likewise also the wife unto the husband” (1st Corinthians 7:3).

- Ask all participants what “due benevolence” means, then ask them how they think it relates to the icebreaker exercise. Then, tell them that it means, above all, trust and kindness to one another.

Main activity:

- 1) Depending on the children’s literacy levels, have them either write down or call out what they are looking for in a spouse. If they are too young or don’t have any ideas, give them examples of traits like, “beautiful,” “kind,” “hard-working,” “lazy,” “selfish,” or “good Christian,” and ask what types of people would make the best husbands/wives.
- 2) Then ask them what they think being married means. If they are reluctant to speak out at first, write a few things down on the wall/board or state things like, “trust,” “being able to raise children,” “selfishness,” “fighting,” “love,” and “sacrificing yourself for the other.” Ask which of these is best in marriage. Make sure to emphasize “equality” and “sacrificing yourself for the other” above all.
- 3) Finally, use a physically resonant example – this really helps to emphasize the need for capable, “equal” partners in marriage. Have a bag full of rocks ready, and a sack. Have two volunteers stand holding the sack, and tell them they must not let the sack touch the ground. Add rocks to the sack one by one, naming them things like, “married life,” “a house,” “a farm,” “one child,” “another child,” “another child,” “feeding your family,” “pleasing your in-laws,” etc. At a certain point, the sack will become heavy – watch and make sure the children aren’t hurting themselves. After the sack has touched the ground/the children can’t hold it up anymore, have everyone return to their seats, and talk to them about the responsibilities of marriage. Ask them what they think about the activity, and how heavy the responsibilities of being married seemed. Ask what might have happened if their partner were much younger/physically weaker than they were, or if one partner refused to hold their end of the sack. Emphasize that because marriage is such a heavy responsibility, it requires two mature, willing, equal partners.

FACILITATOR SPEAKING GUIDE: Thank you for all your participation! No matter what our view of marriage is, this is what God wants us to know: it is a gift, meant to be based on love and respect, but can only be a true blessing when we wait until we are prepared and mature enough.

Supporting verse: “There is time for everything...a time to love...he has made everything beautiful in its time” (Ecclesiastes 3:1).

EM flipchart activity: Engage the participants in the EM flipchart activity, featuring the ____ family and their four children. Please refer to the accompanying flipchart instructions/narrative and speaking guide. Show each child in the ____ family, and give details about how old they are, where they are in school, what they do to help at home, etc. At the end, ask participants which child seems most prepared for marriage. Once all participants have given their answers, flip to the last picture, featuring the oldest daughter in the family with her new husband and both sets of parents on the third day after the marriage, in a traditional coffee ceremony.*

***NOTE: Please give the family in your faith-specific EM flipchart narrative an appropriate local name!**

Supporting verse: Return to Ecclesiastes 3:1 and 1 Corinthians 7:3, and ask all participants if these verses have any more meaning after this flipchart activity.

FACILITATOR SPEAKING GUIDE: Marriage is good, and a blessing, but God wants us to be prepared for marriage. When we marry too young, before we are prepared, we cannot live a full, God-pleasing life, and cannot foster the kind of love and respect that God wants in marriage.

Conclusion

FACILITATOR SPEAKING GUIDE: Marriage is meant to be a mutually loving partnership, and while it is a wonderful blessing that should be enjoyed as soon as we are able, we first must make sure we are ABLE. God loves us all, and wants the best for us – so we must respect all of God’s great gifts to us, including marriage!

Thank you again for joining me today. I hope you all had fun and learned something. The one thing we all need to know is this: by waiting until we are mature and ready to marry, we show respect for God’s gift of marriage, and above all, become a community based on love, mutual respect, and kindness towards one another, just as God would like us to do.

Materials needed: The accompanying illustrated flipchart with the family narration for the EM flipchart activity, and any materials that the facilitator deems necessary based on what main activity they would like to engage the participants in (blackboard, paper and pens, etc.). This may vary depending on the age and literacy level of the group.

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Initial icebreaker: “Blind Leader.”

This is an exercise that emphasizes trust of your partner. One partner is blindfolded, and the other partner must stand at one end of the room, and lead the blindfolded to another corner by calling out directions like, “move to your left!” “walk forward!”. This activity engages two participants who may not know each other and builds a quick sense of trust among the group.

Discussion Questions: How did you feel about that activity? Did you enjoy it? What parts were challenging? How do you think this might be like marriage, in any way?

Supporting verse: Quran 30:21 “...He created for you spouses of your own kind in order that you may repose to them in tranquility and He instilled in your hearts love and affection for one another...”

FACILITATOR SPEAKING GUIDE: Marriage is a gift from Allah, and we should not enter into it lightly. It is meant to be a partnership based on mutual love and respect – anything else is displeasing to Allah. Allah wants us all to wait until we are mentally, emotionally, financially, physically, and spiritually prepared

for marriage, so that we can treat our husband or wife with the love and respect they deserve, and that Allah wants us to show!

Emphasize the following two key messages:

- 1) Marriage is a gift from Allah, meant to be enjoyed as a partnership based on mutual, unconditional, equal love. It is a path to closeness with Allah, not a financial end in itself.
- 2) Like everything, marriage has its proper time. We must be mentally, emotionally, financially, physically, and spiritually prepared for marriage.

Supporting verse: Quran 30:21 “...He created for you spouses of your own kind in order that you may repose to them in tranquility and He instilled in your hearts love and affection for one another...”

- 1) Ask the children how they think this relates to the trust exercise. Make sure that they know that above all, marriage is a gift from Allah, a way to have a trustworthy partner in life. However, to be trusted and to trust another person this much, we must be adequately prepared for marriage.

Main activity:

- 1) Depending on the children’s literacy levels, have them either write down or call out what they are looking for in a spouse. If they are too young or don’t have any ideas, give them examples of traits like, “beautiful,” “kind,” “hard-working,” “lazy,” “selfish,” or “good Muslim,” and ask what types of people would make the best husbands/wives.
- 2) Then ask them what they think being married means. If they are reluctant to speak out at first, write a few things down on the wall/board or state things like, “trust,” “being able to raise children,” “selfishness,” “fighting,” “love,” and “sacrificing yourself for the other.” Ask which of these is best in marriage. Make sure, at the end, to emphasize the need for “equality” and “sacrificing yourself for the other.”
- 3) Finally, use a physically resonant example – this especially helps demonstrate the need for two capable, equal partners in a marriage. Have a bag full of rocks ready, and a sack. Have two volunteers stand holding the sack, and tell them they must not let the sack touch the ground. Add rocks to the sack one by one, naming them things like, “married life,” “a house,” “a farm,” “one child,” “another child,” “another child,” “feeding your family,” “pleasing your in-laws,” etc. At a certain point, the sack will become heavy – watch and make sure the children aren’t hurting themselves. After the sack has touched the ground/the children can’t hold it up anymore, have everyone return to their seats, and talk to them about the responsibilities of marriage. Ask them what they think about the activity, and how heavy the responsibilities of being married seemed. Ask what might have happened if their partner were much younger/physically weaker than they were, or if one partner refused to hold their end of the sack. Emphasize that because marriage is such a heavy responsibility, it requires two mature, willing, equal partners.

FACILITATOR SPEAKING GUIDE: Thank you for all your participation! No matter what our view of marriage is, this is what Allah wants us to know: it is a gift, meant to be based on love and respect, but can only be a true blessing when we wait until we are prepared and mature enough.

Supporting verse: Quran 30:21 “...He created for you spouses of your own kind in order that you may repose to them in tranquility and He instilled in your hearts love and affection for one another...”

FACILITATOR SPEAKING GUIDE: As we know, Quran 30:21 says that Allah “created for you spouses of your own kind in order that you may repose to them in tranquility and He instilled in your hearts love and affection for one another...” Did naming what makes a good spouse, and talking about sharing the burdens in marriage, make you think about this verse any differently? What is the sort of person would make a spouse in whom we could “repose in tranquility,” as Allah wants us to do?

***NOTE: Please give the family in your faith-specific EM flipchart narrative an appropriate local name!**

EM flipchart activity: Engage the participants in the EM flipchart activity, featuring the _____ family with four children. Please refer to the accompanying flipchart instructions/narrative and speaking guide. Show each child in the _____ family, and give details about how old they are, where they are in school, what they do to help at home, etc. At the end, ask participants which child seems most prepared for marriage. Once all participants have given their answers, flip to the last picture, featuring the oldest daughter in the family with her new husband and both sets of parents on the third day after the marriage, in a traditional coffee ceremony.*

Supporting verse: Return to Quran 30:21 again, and now discuss the following Hadith:

- “O young men, whoever among you is (financially and physically) able to marry, he should do so, as this helps him lower his gaze and maintain his chastity; and whoever is unable to (marry), he should observe fasting, as this protects him.” (Hadith of Al-Bukhaari)
 - i. This sunnah clearly tells us that Islam considers the need for mental, physical, and financial maturity before entering into marriage. It is not just referring to young men – it refers to all of us! Waiting until we are properly prepared, as the Prophet tells us in this Hadith, can be hard—however this, instead of early marriage, makes us stronger in the faith, and is far more pleasing to Allah!

FACILITATOR SPEAKING GUIDE: Marriage is good, and a blessing, but Allah wants us to be prepared for marriage, as much as He wants us to be married. When we marry too young, before we are prepared, we cannot live a full, Allah-pleasing life, and cannot foster the kind of love and respect that God wants in marriage.

Conclusion

FACILITATOR SPEAKING GUIDE: Marriage is meant to be a mutually loving partnership, and while it is a wonderful blessing that should be enjoyed as soon as we are able, we first must make sure we are ABLE. Allah wants the best for us – so we must respect all of Allah’s great gifts to us, including marriage!

Thank you again for joining me today. I hope you all had fun and learned something. The one thing we all need to know is this: by waiting until we are mature and ready to marry, we show respect for Allah’s gift of marriage, and above all, become a community based on love, mutual respect, and kindness towards one another, just as Allah would like us to do!