

CONNECT

A Couple-Level Intervention for Heterosexual Couples FACT SHEET

Program Overview

Connect is a **six session, relationship-based intervention** that teaches couples techniques and skills to enhance the quality of their relationship, communication, and shared commitment to safer behaviors. The program is based on the **AIDS Risk Reduction Model**, which organizes behavior change into three phases—recognize risk, commit to change, and act on strategies—and on the **Ecological Perspective** which emphasizes the personal, relational, and societal influences on behavior. **Connect** integrates techniques commonly used in family therapy, which allow couples to work together to solve shared problems. A facilitator conducts a session with each partner separately to orient them to the program and to determine whether the partnership is a “safe” one for the intervention. The couple then attends five 1/1/2- 2-hour sessions together in a private office with the facilitator. The intervention seeks to enhance the couple’s relationship by exploring their gender and power dynamics and focuses on the link between the couple’s communication, skills, HIV/STI risk intentions and behaviors. Communication, problem-solving, and negotiation skills are learned through videos, discussion, coaching, goal setting, and practice during the sessions and at home. Condom use skills are demonstrated, and condoms are given out at each session. The couple also identifies social supports to maintain their safer sex behaviors, and is encouraged to share the intervention messages with their families and community.

Core Elements

- Working with male and female partners together in three to five facilitated sessions.
- Emphasizing the relationship as the target of change: redefining sexual risk reduction from individual protection to protecting and preserving the relationship between two intimate partners: “protecting us.”
- Discussing ideas about relationship fidelity and the need to reduce HIV/STI risk among couples.

- Identifying how gender differences, stereotypes, and power imbalances influence safer sex decision-making and behaviors.
- Using video-based scenarios to model good communication and negotiation of safer sex to stimulate discussions and role-plays.
- Using modeling, role-play, and feedback to teach, practice, and promote mastery in couple communication, negotiation, and problem-solving and social support enhancement.
- Applying couple communication, negotiation, problem-solving, and goal-setting skills to the learning, performance, and maintenance of behaviors to reduce HIV/STI risk.

Target Population

The **Connect** intervention targets heterosexual women or men, 18 and over and their main sexual partners.

Program Materials

- An implementation manual.
- Intervention overview video and a collection of intervention topic videos on a single diskette.
- A training self-refresher, including a collection of training video vignettes on another diskette.
- Materials for reproduction, such as readiness assessment and evaluation forms, myth/fact cards, commitment contract, and educational posters.

Research Results

Connect produced the following results among participating couples at 3- and 12-months after the intervention:

- Significantly decreased the number of unprotected sexual acts
- Significantly increased the rates of condom use

To register for training or to obtain additional information about **Connect**, visit the DEBI website www.effectiveinterventions.org. If you do not have access to the web, you may also call (800) 462-9521, or email interventions@aed.org.

El-Bassel, N., Witte, S., Gilbert, L., Wu E., Chang, M., Hill, J., and Steinglass, P. (2003). The efficacy of a relationship-based HIVSTD prevention program for heterosexual couples. *American Journal of Public Health* 93(6):963-969.