

RESPONDING TO CHALLENGES IN MARRIAGE

Purpose

To help participants learn that husbands and wives must work together to face challenges and that they can choose to respond with patience and love rather than frustration or anger.

Preparation

1. Review the principles under “Your Responsibilities as a Teacher” (pages ix–xi in this manual). Look for ways to apply these principles in your preparation to teach.
2. Read the lesson’s bold headings, which outline the doctrines and principles in the lesson. As part of your preparation, ponder these doctrines and principles throughout the week, seeking the guidance of the Spirit in deciding what you should emphasize to meet participants’ needs.
3. Study the scripture passages on page 19 so you will be ready to conduct a discussion about them.
4. If the *Family Home Evening Resource Book* (31106) is available, study “Resolving Conflicts in Marriage” on pages 240–41. Consider referring to this article during the lesson.

**Suggested Lesson
Development**

All married couples will experience challenges.

Share the following story told by Elder Bruce C. Hafen of the Seventy:

“[A] bride sighed blissfully on her wedding day, ‘Mom, I’m at the end of all my troubles!’ ‘Yes,’ replied her mother, ‘but at which end?’ (in Conference Report, Oct. 1996, 34; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1996, 26).

- What are some troubles or difficulties that can come to a married couple? (Consider writing participants’ answers on the chalkboard. Answers may include those listed below.)

<ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Disagreements b. Selfishness c. Hurt feelings d. Bad health e. Childlessness f. Aging g. Family members with disabilities 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> h. Trying to find fulfillment when all the children have moved away from home i. Death of loved ones j. Financial problems k. Wayward children l. Natural disasters
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Point out that some challenges come as a result of difficulties in the marriage relationship. Others come as a natural part of life.

Husbands and wives can work through any challenge if they view marriage as a covenant relationship.

Explain that married couples will respond to challenges differently depending on how they view their marriage relationship. Write on the chalkboard the words *contract* and *covenant*.

Explain that a contract is a written agreement between two people or groups of people. It is enforceable by the laws of the land. A covenant is similar to a contract but is more far-reaching. The word *covenant* sometimes refers to an agreement between persons, but in the context of the gospel it refers to an agreement between us and the Lord. In a covenant, the Lord sets the terms and we promise to keep them (see Bible Dictionary, “Covenant,” 651). When we keep our promises, the Lord is bound to fulfill His promises (see D&C 82:10).

Point out that many people in today’s society see marriage as nothing more than a contract. Ask participants to think about the following questions without answering aloud:

- When troubles come to a marriage, what might the husband and wife do if they view their relationship as a contract? What will they do if they view their relationship as a covenant?

Elder Bruce C. Hafen of the Seventy observed: “When troubles come, the parties to a *contractual* marriage seek happiness by walking away. They marry to obtain benefits and will stay only as long as they’re receiving what they bargained for. But when troubles come to a *covenant* marriage, the husband and wife work them through. . . . *Contract* companions each give 50 percent; *covenant* companions each give 100 percent. Marriage is by nature a covenant, not just a private contract one may cancel at will” (in Conference Report, Oct. 1996, 34; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1996, 26).

When challenges arise, we can choose to respond with patience and love rather than frustration or anger.

Point out that although husbands and wives cannot avoid some challenges, they can choose how they respond to challenges. Elder Lynn G. Robbins of the Seventy explained: “No one makes us mad. Others don’t make us angry. There is no force involved. Becoming angry is a conscious choice, a decision; therefore, we can make the choice not to become angry. *We choose!*” (in Conference Report, Apr. 1998, 105; or *Ensign*, May 1998, 80).

Emphasize that Heavenly Father has given us agency—the power to choose and act for ourselves. We can exercise our agency by choosing to be patient and loving when challenges come.

Have participants take turns reading the following scriptures aloud. As they read, encourage them to discuss ways these scriptures can apply to husbands and wives as they respond to the challenges of marriage and everyday life.

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| Mosiah 18:21 | 2 Nephi 31:20 |
| 1 John 4:18 | Doctrine and Covenants 24:8 |
| 1 Peter 4:8 (see the Joseph Smith Translation in footnote 8a) | Alma 38:12 |
| John 13:34–35 | 3 Nephi 11:29–30 |
| John 16:33 | James 1:19–20 |
| | Mosiah 3:19 |

- When we feel that we are becoming frustrated or angry, what can we do to overcome these feelings? (Answers may include those listed below.)
 - a. Remove ourselves from the situation until we have calmed down.
 - b. Pray for help and guidance.
 - c. In a disagreement, take time to consider the other person's motivations and feelings.
 - d. Seek help from local Church leaders and, as necessary, professional counselors whose views and practices are consistent with the teachings of the Church.

To illustrate that husbands and wives can choose how they respond to challenges, read the following story. Explain that it is an example of the little, everyday challenges that can occur in a marriage.

"It was one of those days. No matter how fast she ran during the day, Della was not able to keep up with the demands of her family. Her neighbor, with even more children than she, seemed so cheerful that Della began to doubt her own ability as a woman, a wife, and a mother.

"Ben felt hungrier than usual on his way home. An extra eighty miles to deliver farm equipment had been necessary, but now he was tired. Being home sounded better all the time. Peace. Food. Rest.

"Della heard Ben's car in the driveway and glanced at the clock. Oh no! Almost 7:00 P.M.? Now what? She had wanted to have dinner ready, but . . .

"She heard the door open as she hurriedly placed the last biscuit on the baking sheet.

"Ben strode through the door, leaned around the corner, and smiled at Della. She looked tense, and he noticed the empty table. He paused and took a deep breath."

Ask participants the following questions:

- If Ben's concern is only for himself, what might happen?
- If Ben's concern is for his wife, how might he respond?

After discussing the questions, continue with the story:

"Ben exhaled, smiled at Della, and said, 'Looks as if I got here just in time to help.' Her tension disappeared. Relieved, she kissed him and said, 'It's good to have you home, Ben. You've had a long day, and I wanted to have dinner ready for you!' She gestured toward the empty table.

"'We'll finish it together,' he said, placing his arm around her. They then began to share the different challenges each had faced. While Ben set the table, Della put the biscuits in the oven and told him how rushed she had felt—even overwhelmed—all day. Ben forgot about how hungry he was and thought about ways to make her days easier" (*Family Home Evening Resource Book* [1983], 241; paraphrasing altered).

Conclusion

Refer to pages 16–17 in the *Marriage and Family Relations Participant's Study Guide*. Encourage participants to review the doctrines and principles in this

lesson by (1) following at least one of the suggestions in “Ideas for Application” and (2) reading the article “Agency and Anger,” by Elder Lynn G. Robbins. Point out that married couples can receive great benefits from reading and discussing the articles in the study guide together.

Additional

Resource Material

Spouse abuse, an offense to God

Explain that when husbands and wives are angry or frustrated, they sometimes allow their behavior to become abusive and destructive. Spouses should never abuse one another in any way. Abuse violates the commandments of God and the emphatic statements of Church leaders. President George Albert Smith, the eighth President of the Church, declared: “Nobody ever abused anybody else when he had the spirit of the Lord. It is always when we have some other spirit” (in Conference Report, Oct. 1950, 8).

Briefly share the following information:

Spouse abuse can be emotional, physical, or sexual.

Emotional abuse includes actions such as yelling, cursing, making insulting or demeaning remarks, acting in a dictatorial way, humiliating a spouse before children or others, withholding support or affection as punishment, and ignoring or minimizing a spouse’s feelings.

Physical abuse includes pushing, restraining, shaking, hitting, slapping, coercing, and withholding resources.

Sexual abuse may be either emotional or physical. It includes sexual harassment, inflicting pain, using force or intimidation, and persisting in doing things during times of intimacy that are unpleasant or displeasing to the other.

Explain that if participants have further questions about what constitutes abuse, they should seek counsel from their bishop.

Share the following statement by President Gordon B. Hinckley, the 15th President of the Church. Point out that although President Hinckley gave this warning about men who abuse their wives, it is also applicable to women. Ask participants to silently evaluate their own behavior as they listen to this counsel:

“Some [men] put on a fine face before the world during the day and come home in the evening, set aside their self-discipline, and on the slightest provocation fly into outbursts of anger.

“No man who engages in such evil and unbecoming behavior is worthy of the priesthood of God. No man who so conducts himself is worthy of the privileges of the house of the Lord. I regret that there are some men undeserving of the love of their wives and children. There are children who fear their fathers, and wives who fear their husbands. If there be any such men within the hearing of my voice, as a servant of the Lord I rebuke you and call you to repentance. Discipline yourselves. Master your temper. Most of the things that make you angry are of very small consequence. And what a terrible price you are paying for your anger. Ask the Lord to forgive you. Ask your wife to forgive you. Apologize to your children” (in Conference Report, Oct. 1996, 91–92; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1996, 68).

Explain that some people develop aspects of abusive behavior without recognizing it. Others recognize that their behavior needs to be changed but feel unable to make the changes without help.

Those who want help in understanding and changing their abusive behavior can change as they humbly seek the Lord's help and guidance. They may turn to their bishop, who will be able to counsel them. He may also recommend counselors in LDS Family Services or community resources that provide help that is consistent with Church standards.

- In what ways can spouse abuse affect a couple's children?

In addition to asking for participants' responses, point out that spouse abuse sets a lasting example of trying to resolve difficulties in destructive ways. People who have witnessed such abuse as children often mistreat others and continue that pattern when they are married.

- How are children influenced when they see their parents resolve difficulties with kindness and patience?

Explain that mothers and fathers who are loving and mature when they face challenges teach their children good habits that can last a lifetime. While serving as Presiding Bishop, Bishop Robert D. Hales said: "It helps children to see that good parents can have differing opinions and that these differences can be worked out without striking, yelling, or throwing things. They need to see and feel calm communication with respect for each other's viewpoints so they themselves will know how to work through differences in their own lives" (in Conference Report, Oct. 1993, 10; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1993, 9).