



TOGETHER

Couples Games



Couples Nights
Facilitator guide

Welcome!

Couples Nights are one component of the TOGETHER Couples Games intervention.

This guide will help you understand how to organize and host Couples Nights.



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Introduction



What are Couples Nights?

Couples Nights are fun events that promote connection between couples and introduce participants to the couples card deck. There are three Couples Nights events. Each event lasts about one hour.

1. Introductory Event: During this event, you will introduce the couples card deck, model its use, and help couples begin conversations with each other through a fun game.
2. Follow-up Event: During this event, you will help couples reflect on their discussions and relationships and reinforce use of the card deck.
3. Celebration Event: During this event, you will help couples celebrate the progress they have made in their relationship and discuss family planning questions with a provider.

Couples Nights should be hosted by a pair of facilitators.



What is the Purpose of Couples Nights?

The purpose of Couples Nights is to:

- Introduce the couples card deck in a fun environment
- Get couples excited about playing the card deck
- Model and reinforce use of the card deck
- Promote connection and dialogue among couples



Who Should Attend Couples Nights?

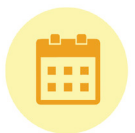
The intended audience is couples in a committed relationship who may want to have children in the future. Couples should be somewhat familiar with reproductive health and family planning, and at least one member of each couple should be able to read.

The facility should offer the 3-event series of Couples Nights to one cohort of 8-12 couples at a time. You should limit it to 12 couples because it can get loud with many people talking at once. Once the series is complete, you should conduct another series of events with a new cohort, until you have reached the desired number of couples in the catchment area. These couples can be part of existing groups or initiatives or newly recruited through the TOGETHER flyers.



Where Should Couples Nights be Held?

The Couples Nights can be held in various locations, depending on what works best in your context. The venue should be in a neutral location that is easily accessible by couples and private enough to allow for open conversations. You should also consider the acoustics of the venue; you want couples to be able to hear you and each other well, even when multiple couples are speaking at the same time. Some examples may include outdoor food court areas, a community hall, or a place of worship.



When Should Couples Nights be Held?

Couples Nights should be held in the evenings when both partners in a couple are available to attend. You can choose a date and time that works best for participants. The Follow-up Event should occur about 2 weeks after the Introductory Event. The Celebration Event should happen about 3 weeks after the Follow-up Event.

Making Couples Nights Successful

Following these tips will help you make Couples Nights a success.

- **Start every event with an icebreaker.** Icebreakers help set the tone, put participants at ease, and make the events engaging. Think of icebreakers as an investment for a smoother discussion. They do not need to be long to be effective; if time is short, do a quick one. Sample icebreakers are included in the sections below.
- **Reinforce key messages.** You can deepen couples' understanding of topics and reinforce new behaviors by sharing key messages during Couples Nights. You will find key messages for each event in their sections below.
- **Hold events in neutral spaces to encourage participation.** Identify spaces like community halls or an open space outdoors that are neutral and easily accessible, allowing participants to feel comfortable and openly engage. While health facilities can be convenient, in some cases, they may limit men's participation, as they may fear HIV testing or being seen at a facility.
- **Involve family planning providers in the events.** Where feasible, it can be helpful to invite family planning providers from the local facility to the events. This can allow participants to ask questions and get comfortable with the providers. At a minimum, a provider should attend the third event to address myths and misconceptions.
- **Use music.** Incorporating music into the events can create a welcoming atmosphere and has been highly appreciated by participants. You can use music as participants arrive, during breaks, or as part of icebreakers.
- **Attend support groups.** The implementers will create support groups to help you implement Couples Nights. After each Couples Night, the group should meet in-person or virtually to discuss how things went, determine improvements to be made, identify skills that need strengthening, and make plans for the next Couples Night.
- **Coordinate with implementers.** The Couples Nights are meant to be repeated with new groups of couples (cohorts) once the initial set is complete. Work with the implementers to determine how many couples you want to reach in the catchment area and how much time you want to wait in between cohorts.
- **Think of yourself as a facilitator.** Much of the couples' learning will come as you encourage them to reflect, facilitate discussions between them, and make connections between what they say. Use the suggestions below to strengthen your facilitation skills.



Facilitation Tips

Strong facilitation is essential to the success of Couples Nights. To help couples feel comfortable and learn, you will need to actively listen to participants, keep them engaged, balance the discussion, and make it fun.

Listen Actively

Practice active listening during Couples Nights by following these four steps:

- **Contact:** Listen to each participant attentively and reinforce what is being said by maintaining eye contact or non-verbal responses.
- **Absorb:** Listen to what each person says and pay attention to their body language without judgment or evaluation.
- **Feedback:** Summarize and repeat back what the speaker says.
- **Confirm:** Ask the speaker to confirm that you understand their points accurately.

Listen carefully to concerns; ask for more details and use open-ended questions, such as:

- Can you tell me more about that?
- How does that make you feel?
- What do you think about ...?
- What questions do you have about...?
- What if we looked at it (a different) way?



Encourage and Balance Participation

Create a safe, welcome space for all participants to share during the events. Starting with an icebreaker and using energizers throughout can help participants feel comfortable and engaged. Make it fun and remind couples that there is no right answer. To encourage participation, ask open-ended questions, such as:

- **What do you think?**
- **What would you do?**
- **What other ideas are you considering?**

Make sure nobody is being left out of the discussion. Pay attention to gender dynamics and deliberately invite women to share their thoughts. Some tricks for balancing the discussion include:

- **Dividing participants into small groups.** This can help quieter participants engage in discussion more freely.
- Using “round robins” where each person is asked to state their views without being interrupted by anyone else in the group. The facilitator then helps the group summarize ideas shared.
- **Role playing.** Invite specific people or couples to role play in front of the group or ask couples to do their own role play so everybody has a chance to discuss the topic.
- **Limiting the number of times each person can speak during an event.** This can ensure more equal treatment. Similarly, facilitators can use a physical object to indicate whose turn it is to speak.
- **Alternating between members of different groups to speak.** For example, switch between male and female participants (e.g., we heard from a woman, now let’s hear from a man).





Keep the Energy High

Couples Nights should be fun and energizing. To keep the energy high, try using some of these strategies.

- Take short breaks. Offering food during the breaks can be motivating.
- Change the scenery. Invite the participants to move around the room or go outside.
- Lead a quick stretching or dancing activity to help participants feel physically and mentally refreshed.
- Use flipchart or a white board/chalk board to visualize points made during the event.
- Use short energizers to lighten the mood.
- Play music at the beginning of the event, during breaks, or while people are reflecting.

Bridge Comments

Encourage discussion – and not just one-off comments – by acknowledging what a participant said and connecting it to what other participants have contributed. Refer to earlier ideas shared and help participants make connections. You can use phrases like, “that sounds similar to what [person’s name] was saying,” or, “I have heard several people mention x,” or asking questions like, “Has anybody else had a similar experience/thought?” or “What resonates with you?” or “Does anybody view this from a different perspective?”



Introductory Event

During the Introductory Event, you will lead couples in a game to help them connect and foster feelings of being part of a team. You will introduce couples to the couples card deck by providing an overview and role-playing. You will answer couples' questions and help couples plan for when they will play the card deck.

Objectives

- Introduce the card deck to couples
- Help couples feel like a team
- Get couples interested and excited to play the card deck
- Get couples to commit to coming back in two weeks for a follow-up event

Materials Needed

- Couples card decks (one deck for each couple and the facilitators)
- Game sheets (one for each participant)
- Pencils or pens (one for each participant)
- Snacks and drinks
- Most Connected Couple pins (two)
- Couples night sign-in sheets
- Couples night poster

Key Messages

- Open communication is critical to a healthy relationship
- Do not assume you know what your partner wants; discuss it!
- Planning for your future sets you up for success
- You are a team and can work together to set and achieve goals for your relationship/family
- Playing the TOGETHER card deck can help you strengthen your relationship and feel closer to your partner

Agenda

Below is a proposed agenda for the Introductory Event. You can make adaptations as needed to fit your context.

Time	Activity
5 min	Welcome participants and do an icebreaker
15 min	Facilitate couples game
35 min	<div>Introduce the deck to couples<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Overview of the couples card deck• Role play the card deck• Questions• Couples plan for when and where they will play together</div>
5 min	<div>Close<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Make the case for playing the card deck• Remind participants of date, time, and location of the next event</div>

Preparing for the Event

1

Set a date and time for the event.

Select a date and time that will generally work well for couples to attend.

2

Book/arrange the venue.

Select a venue that is easily accessible to couples and that will allow couples to dialogue without distractions. Consider the acoustics, ensuring that everybody will be able to hear each other well. If couples are already using a certain venue for couples gatherings, consider using the same venue for consistency.

3

Recruit couples.

Using the TOGETHER flyers and poster, recruit a cohort of 8-12 couples. You may invite couples who are already attending some sort of couples' gatherings, or newly recruit couples based on the mapping you conducted during the training.

4

Procure snacks and drinks.

Purchase some simple snacks and drinks for the event. This helps reinforce the fun element and encourages participation.

5

Prepare supplies.

Ensure you have all the materials listed above.

6

Set up venue.

Hang up the Couples Night poster on the outer door. Arrange the room with a couple chairs up front for the facilitators. If you do not have chairs, mark off a space for the facilitators. Set up groups of two chairs for each couple. Tables may be helpful so couples can write on their game sheets, but they are not necessary.



Hosting the Event



1. Ask couples to sign in.

To have a record of who attended, ask the couples to sign in using the couples night sign-in sheets as they arrive. You may want to collect phone numbers so you can remind them of the next events and encourage them to play the card deck.

3. Kick off with an icebreaker.

To help people feel comfortable, and to set the tone for a fun event, start off with a short icebreaker. You can use any icebreaker that will help couples connect and have fun. A few examples are provided below.

- a. **2 Truths and a Lie:** Ask each couple to discuss and come up with three statements about their relationship, two true and one fictional. Ask each couple to introduce themselves to another couple using the 3 statements. The other couple will guess which statement is fictional. After every couple has introduced themselves to another couple, ask people to raise their hands if they correctly guessed the fictional statement.
- b. **Tell me More:** Ask each couple to introduce their partner using 3-5 single words that describe their partner.
- c. **Symbols:** Give the couples time to discuss and select an item that symbolizes their relationship. Ask a few couples to share the item with the group.
- d. **Team Names:** Give the couples a few minutes to come up with a team name. Then pass a ball/other object around. When a couple gets the ball, they introduce themselves by their team name and then pass the ball to another couple.

2. Welcome.

Welcome the participants and provide them with an overview of the event. Explain that this event is part of the TOGETHER Couples Games in the *Together We Can* Client-Provider Package, and that there will be three couples night events. These Couples Nights aim to help couples feel more connected with each other, improve communication – especially about reproductive health and family planning, and introduce the couples' deck cards. Provide a high-level overview of what will happen during the event.

- e. **Would You Rather:** Ask participants a set of "would you rather" questions and have them share their answers with their partners. For example, "Would you rather be invisible or be able to read minds?" or "Would you rather eat your favorite food for a year or not eat it at all for a year?"
- f. **Line Up:** Ask the participants to line up in a specific order without speaking to each other. For example, you could ask them to line up in alphabetical order by first name, or by age or birth month.



4. Facilitate the couples game

a. Now you will facilitate the couples game found here

b. Game overview

- Pass out a game sheet and pen/pencil to every participant and explain how the game will work (instructions below).
- Read each question on the sheet aloud. Participants should independently fill out the answers based on their knowledge of their partner.
- After completing all 10 questions, each couple will compare answers and mark which of their answers matched. Every match is worth one point.
- Couples will add up their points. Ask couples to reflect on what their score means. What surprised them? Which questions matched and which did not? What does this say about their relationship? Ask a few couples to share their thoughts.
- Ask couples who have 5 or more points to stand up. Ask couples to remain standing if they have 6 or more points. Continue the process until you only have 1-2 couples remaining. These will be the winners. Ask the winners why they think they got so many answers correct. Ask all participants what their results inspire them to do.
- Congratulate the winning couple(s) and dub them the “Most Connected Couple.” Give them a “Most Connected Couple” pin or other branded item as a prize.



5. Introduce card deck

a. Provide an overview of the couples card deck.

- **What it is:** A card activity designed to help couples pause, connect, and envision the life you want to create together. It will help you learn more about each other and make a plan for how to achieve your goals as a couple—while having a bit of fun!

There are 4 rounds in the card deck:

1. **“Mambo”** to break the ice and help you connect with your partner
2. **“Vision”** to explore the goals you have for your future together
3. **“Plan”** to start a discussion about if, and when, you and your partner would like to have children
4. **“Prepare”** for a visit with a healthcare provider to make your plans a reality.

- **Who it’s for:** The card deck is designed for couples who are somewhat familiar with reproductive health and family planning and are interested in discussing this topic with their partner.



- **Where and when to play:** Couples can play the game anywhere they feel comfortable. Couples may want to play when they have a moment alone and can speak freely to one another without interruption. If at home, couples could play in the evening after work (or if they have children, after their children have gone to bed). Couples could also consider playing in the afternoon while relaxing or while children are busy playing.
- **Time it takes to play:** “Level 1” takes a minimum of 30 minutes but can last longer depending on how long the couple discusses each of the questions. “Level 2” is shorter and takes around 20 minutes to play.

b. Role play

- Two facilitators pretend to be a couple playing the game. You will read the instruction card and take turns asking and answering the first question for each round in front of the group.
 1. Model openness, honesty, and connection during the conversation. Respond to the other facilitator’s answer by acknowledging what they said or connecting in some way “Thanks for sharing that” or “That’s so interesting” or “I have felt that way before, too.”
 2. Model continued dialogue when there is difference of opinion (e.g., if one partner does not want any children but the other really wants children). “I had not considered that. Can you tell me more about how you feel?”

- c. Answer questions. Take time to answer any questions the couples have about the deck and any logistics.
- d. Couples plan. Help the couples make a verbal commitment and plan for when they will play the cards. If you have time, couples can share their commitment with another couple nearby.



6. Close event

- a. Remind couples of the next event. Remind couples that there will be a second event on [fill in date and time] and encourage them to come. They should play at least part of the deck before that event.
- b. Encourage playing the card deck. Get the couples excited about the deck and remind them that they are a team and can work together to set and achieve goals for their relationship/family.

Follow-up Event

During this event, you will lead couples in another game to frame the event in a fun, light way. You will help couples reflect on their discussions from the card deck and facilitate a group discussion. You will reinforce use of the card deck and encourage them to visit a healthcare provider to ask questions and discuss their options.

Objectives

- Reflect on the discussion couples had while playing the card deck together and the influence it has had on their relationships
- Get couples excited to continue connecting, reflecting, and planning for the future together

Materials Needed

- Game sheets (one for each participant)
- Pens or pencils
- Snacks and drinks
- Couples card deck (for facilitators)
- Most Connected Couple pins (two)
- Couples Night poster
- Referral slips



Key Messages

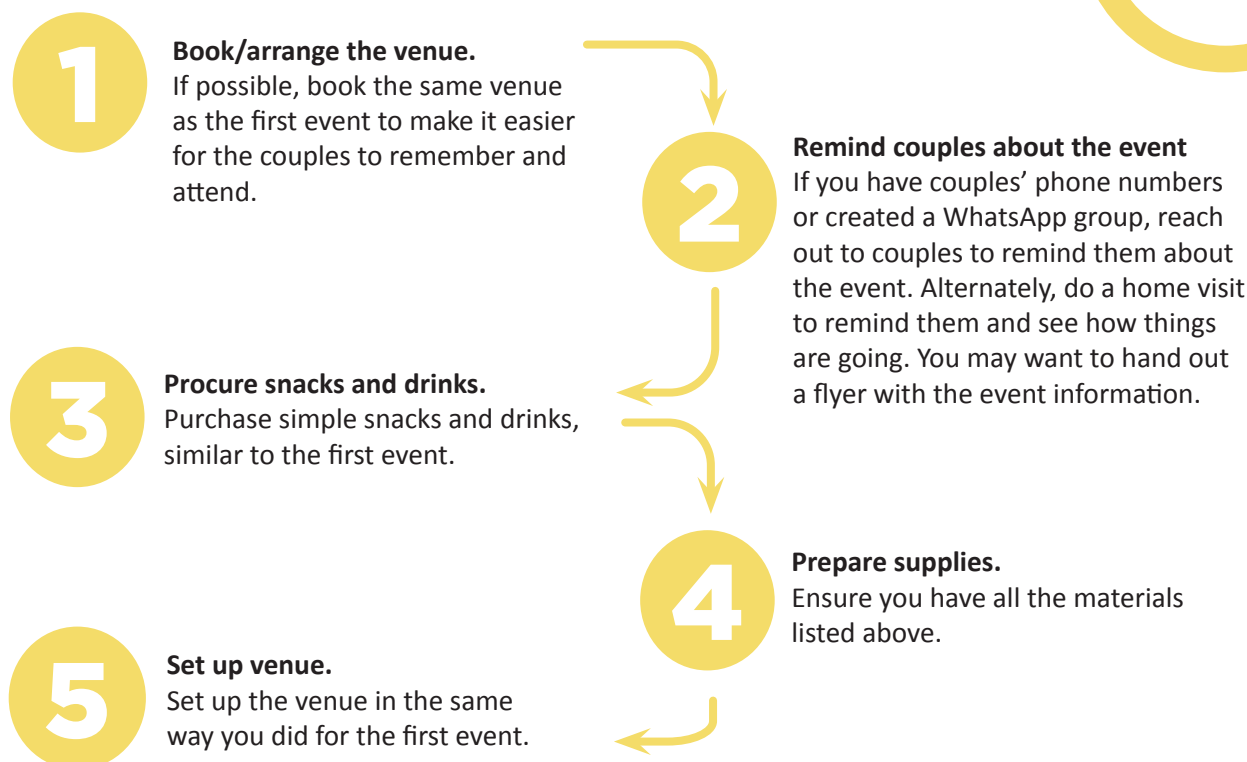
- Talking with a healthcare provider about family planning can help you achieve the goals you and your partner set
- It is important to regularly discuss your goals, desires, and needs since opinions and circumstances change over time
- Making decisions together deepens intimacy and strengthens emotional connections
- Keep connecting, reflecting, and planning together by playing level two of the card deck

Agenda

Below is a proposed agenda for the Follow-up Event. You can make adaptations as needed to fit your context

Time	Activity
5 min	Start with an ice breaker Remind participants of key takeaways from last event
15 min	Facilitate couples game
30 min	Facilitate reflection and group discussion
7 min	Respond to questions
3 min	Close

Preparing for the Event



Hosting the Event

1. Welcome.

Remind participants of the purpose of the Couples Nights. Explain that during this event, you will help the couples reflect on the discussions they had while playing the couples card deck and the connections they made with each other.

2. Ask couples if they played the card deck together.

Ask one member of each couple to raise their hand if they played level 1 of the card deck with their partner. Use the attendance sheet to note which couples completed level 1 before coming to the follow up event.

3. Remind participants of key takeaways.

Highlight some of the main points from the last event. Remind participants of key messages.

4. Kick off with an icebreaker.

Similar to the first event, start off with a short icebreaker to help people feel comfortable and set the tone for a fun event (see examples from the first event for ideas).

5. Facilitate the couples' game.

The game is run in the same way as the game in the first event, but the questions are different

a. Game overview

- Pass out a game sheet and pen/pencil to every participant and explain how the game will work (instructions below).
- Read each question on the sheet aloud. Participants should independently fill out the answers based on their knowledge of their partner.
- After completing all 10 questions, each couple will compare answers and mark which of their answers matched. Every match is worth one point.
- Couples will add up their points. Ask couples to reflect on their scores. Did they score higher? Why or why not? What was still challenging? Where did they improve? Ask couples who have 5 or more points to stand up. Ask couples to remain standing if they have 6 or more points. Continue the process until you only have 1-2 couples remaining. These will be the winners.

- b. Congratulate the winning couple(s) and dub them the “Most Connected Couple.” Give them each a “Most Connected Couple” pin or other branded item as a prize.

6. Facilitate self-reflection and discussion

- a. Set the tone for the discussion by reminding participants that this should be a safe, confidential space for sharing.
- b. Help participants reflect on their experience playing the card deck by asking some discussion questions. You may add your own questions and/or revise the questions below to fit your context. Make sure you ask both men and women to respond to the questions.
 - How did it feel to have this discussion with your partner?
 - What is one thing you learned about your partner?
 - What is one thing that surprised you?
 - Has anything in your relationship changed since you have had this discussion? How?
- c. Ask the questions to the whole group and give participants time to reflect on the answers before responding. Try to get several responses to each question and encourage everybody to share at some point during the event.



Make special efforts to encourage women to contribute. Connect participants' comments and ask follow-up questions to create a discussion between couples. For example, use questions like, “Does anybody else have a similar/different experience?” or “What do the rest of you think?” or “What did you take away from that comment?”

7. Respond to questions

- a. Ask participants if they have any lingering questions about the card deck. Respond to their questions.

8. Close

- a. Emphasize the importance of continuing these discussions as a couple, as opinions and circumstances change over time. Remind them that they are a team and that, working together, they can plan for their future and reach their goals.
- b. Explain that the “Level 2” cards can be played as desired to prompt continued connection, reflection, and planning.
- c. Encourage couples to visit a provider to discuss any questions they have about family planning and reproductive health. Give couples referral slips to take with them to the facility. For each slip, fill out the left side with the ticket number and the catchment area, and mark how many couples nights the couple attended. Fill out the top right area in green with the ticket number, catchment area, and number of couples nights attended. Keep the left column and tear off the right side of the slip for the couple.

Referral Slip

N°

COUPLES NIGHTS ATTENDED:
☐ 1ST
☐ 2ND
☐ 3RD

FACILITY CATCHMENT AREA:

TOGETHER WE CAN
 A package to foster client-centered family planning

Bring this slip to the health center during your family planning consultation

USAID | Bristlecone

To be filled out by the person giving the slip:
 N°
 FACILITY CATCHMENT AREA: _____

COUPLES NIGHTS ATTENDED:
☐ 1ST
☐ 2ND
☐ 3RD

To be filled out by the provider at the facility:
 CLIENT ☐ NEW ☐ EXISTING

This person came to the health center for the following reason:
☐ IUD ☐ Pills ☐ Sayana Press ☐ Cycle Beads
☐ Implant ☐ Injectables ☐ Condom ☐ Consultation

AGE ☐ 15-19 YEARS ☐ 20-24 YEARS ☐ 25-29 YEARS ☐ 30+ ☐ PEPP

CLIENT COUPLE ☐ ☐
 FEMALE MALE ☐ ☐
- d. Remind participants of the date and time of the next event.

Celebration Event

During this event, you will help couples celebrate their successes in connecting and planning for their future and provide opportunities to discuss myths and misconceptions with a family planning provider. This event helps bring closure to the activities, reinforces behaviors, and allows couples to celebrate progress and discuss questions with a provider.

Objectives

- Help couples celebrate their own and others' successes
- Reinforce couples' communication
- Resolve family planning questions

Materials Needed

- Snacks and drinks
- Couples Nights Completion Certificates (one for each couple)
- Couples Night poster

Key Messages

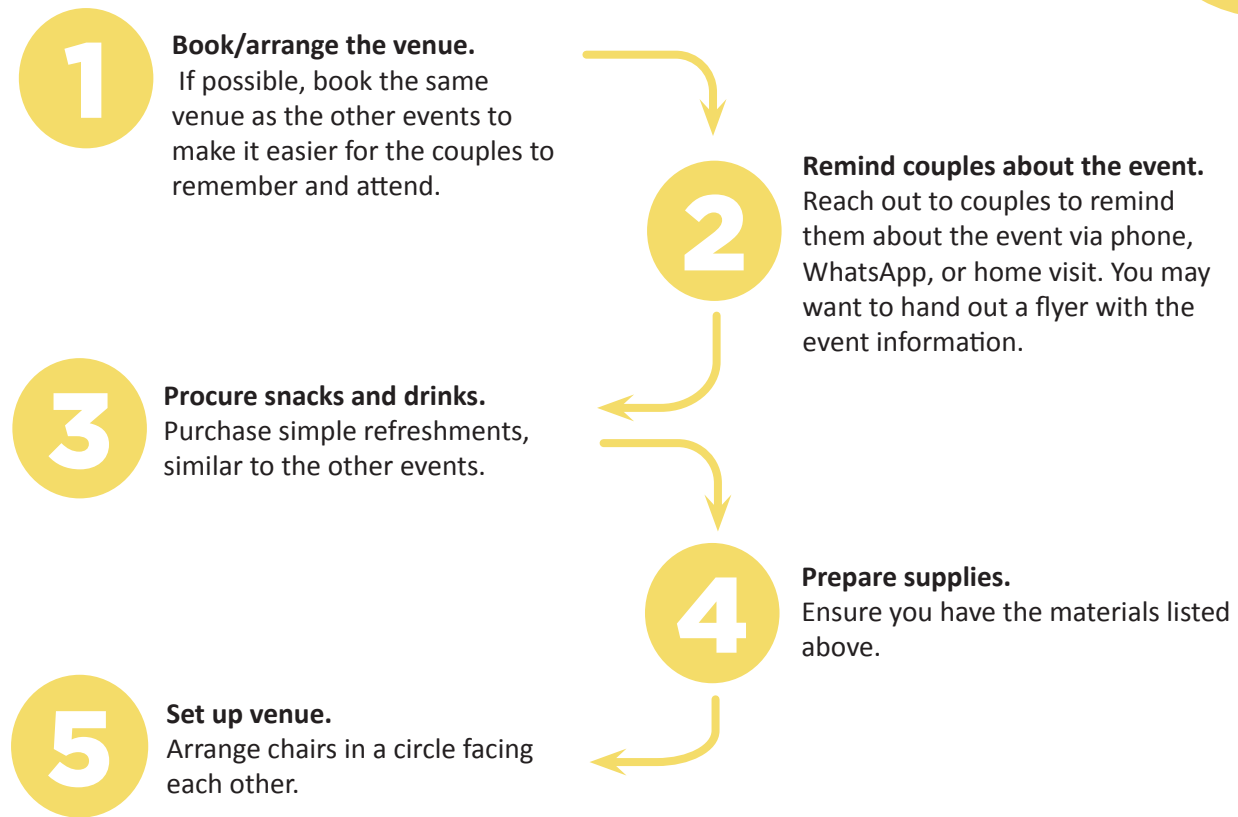
- Find a few minutes every day to talk with your partner about something you care about
- You can achieve great things when you work together as a couple
- Visit a healthcare provider soon to discuss family planning options
- Support your partner in their interests and needs

Agenda

Below is a proposed agenda for the Celebration Event. You can make adaptations as needed to fit your context.

Time	Activity
5 min	Start with an ice breaker Remind participants of key takeaways from last event
20 min	Share successes and experiences
15 min	Family planning questions and answers
10 min	Present certificates
5 min	Close

Preparing for the Event



Hosting the Event

1. Welcome.

Welcome participants and explain that during this event, you will be celebrating everybody's successes together.



2. Kick off with an icebreaker and highlight takeaways.

Start the event with a short icebreaker to set the tone and get participants engaged. Then share some main points from the second event and reinforce key messages.

3. Share successes.

- Ask participants to share two things with the group:
 - Something they are proud of in their relationship right now.
 - A hope they have for their relationship. Give participants several minutes to reflect on their responses.
- Go around the circle and ask every participant to share responses to both of those prompts. After each person shares, ask the group to clap or share congratulations or encouragement with them.

4. Share experiences.

- a. Ask if anybody has an experience they would like to share with the group. This could be their experience visiting a healthcare provider, their experience setting a goal with their partner, a conversation they were able to have with a partner (that they may not have had before participating in these activities), or a way they were able to connect with their partner recently.
- b. Remind participants that they do not need to share any details they do not feel comfortable sharing, and that everybody will maintain confidentiality.
- c. Connect participant comments by highlighting common experiences and summarizing recurring themes. Thank participants for sharing their experiences.



5. Host question and answer session.

- a. Invite the family planning provider to the front of the room and explain that couples can now ask any family planning questions they have.
- b. The provider will respond to questions, address any myths and misconceptions, and encourage couples to visit a facility to discuss their options with a provider if they have not already.



6. Present completion certificates.

- a. Call each couple up by name and hand them their certificates.
- b. Ask participants to clap for each couple.

7. Administer post-test couples survey.

- a. If you are conducting a post-test survey, throughout the final event, call individuals out of the main room to take the post-test couples survey. The survey should take ~10 minutes per participant.

8. Close.

- a. Thank the participants for their participation across the events.
- b. Remind them that they can play “Level 2” in the card deck whenever they want.
- c. Encourage them to continue dialoguing with each other, setting goals, and supporting each other. They are all now “connected couples”!
- d. Provide referral slips to any couples who did not receive them during the previous event.

TOGETHER WE CAN



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