WARRIOR TO SOUL MATE
SUPPORTED BY PAIRS ESSENTIALS
VA Mission

To fulfill President Lincoln’s promise “To care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan” by serving and honoring the men and women who are America’s Veterans.

VA has adopted Core Values and Characteristics that apply universally across the Department. The five Core Values define “who we are,” our culture and how we care for Veterans, their families and other beneficiaries. The Values are Integrity, Commitment, Advocacy, Respect and Excellence (“I CARE”).

Integrity: Act with high moral principle. Adhere to the highest professional standards. Maintain the trust and confidence of all with whom I engage.

Commitment: Work diligently to serve Veterans and other beneficiaries. Be driven by an earnest belief in VA’s mission. Fulfill my individual responsibilities and organizational responsibilities.

Advocacy: Be truly Veteran-centric by identifying, fully considering, and appropriately advancing the interests of Veterans and other beneficiaries.

Respect: Treat all those I serve and with whom I work with dignity and respect. Show respect to earn it.

Excellence: Strive for the highest quality and continuous improvement. Be thoughtful and decisive in leadership, accountable for my actions, willing to admit mistakes, and rigorous in correcting them.

DISCLAIMER: The Warrior to Soul Mate (W2SM) Program guide is intended for VA sites choosing to use the PAIRS Essentials curriculum as a resource for relationship education. It does not suggest, imply or endorse PAIRS as the only, best or exclusive provider of such materials for the Veterans Health Administration. This is a Program Guide only and its existence does not imply or regulate in any way how VA facilities should conduct relationship education as a proactive, preventative medical treatment and/or education venture. In no way is this guide intended to be prescriptive of an official VA policy.

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Welcome to the Warrior to Soul Mate ("W2SM") Program support guide. This guide is designed to help VISNs, local medical centers, VET centers, and other VA facilities launch the W2SM program. You will find help to create a successful W2SM program and to develop specific opportunities to present the PAIRS Essentials curriculum to our Veterans and their significant others. Supporting documents for this program guide are provided in the Appendix.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program Guide Contents</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Promoting Health and Well-Being</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W2SM in Your VISN/Facility</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gaining Support and Authorization</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funding</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contracting vs. Purchase Card</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Publicity and Referral</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recruitment</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consult Process</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrative Support</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certified Instructors</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lead Instructor Guidelines</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qualities of an Effective Instructor</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentors on Site</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACORRN</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentor Guidelines</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date and Time</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting Room or Site</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation Tools</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welcoming/Declining Letters</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schedule and Formats</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Documentation</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equipment and Supplies</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Warrior to Soul Mate Program (W2SM) supports the initiative of the Department of Veterans Affairs Office of Patient Centered Care and Cultural Transformation. W2SM program seeks to assist Veterans and their significant others towards healthy relationships that promote and utilize the components of proactive health and well-being.
Purpose

The primary purpose of the Warrior to Soul Mate Program is to strengthen a Veteran’s relationship with their significant others through the teaching of communication skills as presented in the PAIRS Essentials curriculum. The success of the W2SM program requires building a solid foundation. There are four key components to this foundation:

1. **Support of VISN and Local Executive Leadership**

The W2SM program nationally upholds the work and philosophy of the Office of Patient Centered Care and Cultural Transformation. The program supports local initiatives related to:

- Reintegretation
- Stress-related and induced illnesses
- Homelessness
- Suicidal thinking or actions
- Depression, and other mental health issues
- Substance abuse and other addictive behaviors
- Domestic Violence, abuse and neglect

2. **Collaboration with Mental Health and other VA professionals**

- The W2SM program represents an excellent opportunity to further the initiative of VA Mental Health and Chaplaincy
- Developing a working partnership with mental health is essential to provide trained facilitators to maintain strong, consistent and vibrant programing
- Facilitators may also be recruited from other areas to include nursing, administration, learning resources, etc. (see page 20 for Qualities of an Effective Instructor)

3. **Partnership with Veterans, Voluntary Service and other VA Stakeholders**

- Veterans and their significant others who meet the guidelines for effective facilitators represent an excellent resource
- Veterans relate with Veterans and have proven to be excellent instructors and coaches!
- Voluntary service can provide Volunteers to help support the WtSM program as well as a resource to support other logistical needs
- Volunteer Service Organizations are great partners to share the opportunities and services the W2SM program provides our Veterans and to provide additional resources

4. **Return of Investment**

- Restoring Veteran relationships - The literature is clear that the fracturing of relationships has significant impact upon physical, emotional and spiritual health and can be a significant contribution to disease
- You may want to also consider the cost/return benefit - for example, the cost of one class or retreat versus the cost of one medical test, let alone treatment
In late 2008 the Charlie Norwood VA Chief of Chaplain Services, Chaplain Ron Craddock, saw the growing need to help Veterans whose marriages were stressed by military service, including multiple deployments.

Chaplain Craddock explored many models for providing marriage enrichment education. He chose an evidence and outcomes-based model created by the nonprofit PAIRS Foundation. Chaplain Craddock, Chaplain Ed Waldrop, and Social Worker Helen Galen held their first PAIRS marriage enrichment workshop during the 2009 Valentine’s Weekend.

In December 2009, the Charlie Norwood VA received a VA National Chaplain Center Best Practice Award for their provision of marriage enrichment education using the PAIRS model. Then in May 2011, Charlie Norwood VA was awarded the National Military Chaplains Association Distinguished Service Award (referencing the retreats) for all of VHA.

In April 2010, the VA Office of Patient Centered Care and Cultural Transformation awarded the VA San Diego Healthcare System Chaplain Service a grant to pilot PAIRS programming on the west coast.

This program proved so successful that VA San Diego was asked to expand the program nationally a year later. That grant funded PAIRS retreats by VA San Diego, Balboa Naval Hospital, Loma Linda VA, Charlie Norwood VA, Manchester VA, Atlanta VA, Columbia VA, and Hampton VA. Indianapolis VA applied separately and was awarded funding through the same grant. Further San Diego, Indianapolis and Hampton coordinated PAIRS Level One Certification Trainings in August and September, 2011 resulting in an additional 250 plus persons being certified as instructors.

In September 2012, VA San Diego’s collaboration with PAIRS Foundation was recognized with the Spirit of Planetree Award for the program’s impact on strengthening relationships between family, friends and social supports as a central component of patient-centered care. Also that month, VHA promoted VA’s national commitment to helping strengthen Veteran families in a feature article that appeared on all VA websites nationwide.

Full article at www.va.gov/health/NewsFeatures/20121018a.asp.
WtSM in Your VISN and Facility

The National Chaplain Center is currently working toward a plan for sustainment of the Warrior to Soul Mate program throughout VHA. The goal of this effort is gain support and funding at the VISN and local facility level. A plan strategic plan for sustainment will be presented during FY14. In the meantime, there are two important considerations:

1. Sustaining the work of the W2SM programs that currently exist:
   - Recruiting and training more facilitators
   - Increasing number of opportunities for W2SM retreats/workshops
   - Consider providing leadership for VISN wide expansion
   - Securing funding resources and expanding local budget to include the W2SM program
   - Collaborate with Voluntary Service for additional resources
   - Develop community partnerships

2. Establishing the W2SM program in facility and/or VISN
   - Present W2SM program to leadership
   - Secure funding and resources
   - Recruit and train facilitators to present the PAIRS curriculum
   - Implement W2SM program locally and/VISN wide

For more information and support in sustaining and implementing the W2SM program please contact the National Chaplain Center Liaison for the Warrior to Soul Mate Program:

Clyde Angel, DMin, BCC, LPC
NCC Liaison for the W2SM Program
clyde.angel@va.gov
Phone: (317) 988-4187

For more guidance in gaining support and authorization for the W2SM program, see page 8.

Hampton VA Chief of Chaplain Services Sue Cross, left, with PAIRS Trainer Lauren DelGando at PAIRS Training in Hampton, Virginia.
Gaining Support and Authorization

Perhaps you are a newly certified instructor and have already had initial support from your supervisor and organization. If so, you have achieved a major accomplishment. If not, it’s helpful to consider how to gain that support.

Once you are clear on how your mission to provide PAIRS supports the VA mission and have written your mission statement, you are ready for the next step -- getting authorization from your boss.

How does your boss prefer to receive proposals? Verbal or written? Perhaps your supervisor or institution has a formal process in place for evaluating proposals?

Your presentation should be direct, clear, concise, specific, honest and demonstrate tangible, measurable benefits to the institution and VA’s mission. Be aware of any key strategic initiatives within your VA at the time of your proposal and how your request compliments or otherwise impacts those initiatives. Ask yourself if you believe in and are passionate about what you are requesting. Are you ready to commit yourself to the task, including overcoming obstacles, roadblocks and other barriers? If not, do not ask.

Many have found PAIRS highly effective as a proactive, preventative health care intervention to strengthen relationships for Veterans. San Diego VA’s recognition with the Spirit of Planetree Award is an example worth sharing. Significant research has found an association between stable, healthy relationships and reducing stress-related illnesses, suicides, depression, psychiatric illness, and homelessness. The fracturing of intimate relationships may result in financial distress, domestic abuse and neglect, and substance abuse as a coping mechanism to deal with the grief of relational discord.

You could further state that reducing current and future demand on a stressed healthcare system with thousands returning from Iraq and Afghanistan, means greater access for those who still need it. Some VA Medical Centers are considering encouraging Veterans awaiting mental health services to first participate in PAIRS, both as a cost-effective opportunity to provide prompt assistance to Veterans and help prepare them to get the greatest benefit from the mental health services they receive in the future.

You might quote from the letters of so many couples who express how PAIRS has saved their marriages. You can find sample quotes from couples at participant.pairs.com/thankyou.html. Video testimonials for Veteran program graduates are also available, as are feature stories, such as American Veteran’s coverage of the program at the Charlie Norwood VA. You may also consider referencing research to show the expected longer-term outcomes. More information is available at evaluation.pairs.com.

If you wish to serve Active Duty, Guard and Reserves, it will be important to know how your institution is already working with those populations and what their goals are for doing so. Are
they hoping to provide a seamless transition to VA enrollment? Do they wish to earn the good will of the Department of Defense or members of the community? Knowing local priorities will help you demonstrate how your programming will support their goals.

Your own enthusiasm and commitment is vital. To be successful, you must be willing to do the work that it will take, but this must be directly linked with the mission of the organization and the priorities of your supervisor and institution as a component of coordinated care and service to Veterans.

Who are natural allies within your institution? Social Work, Mental Health, Nursing? Key individuals or committees? Will they join you in making a presentation and add their names in support? Build alliances and network with those who share your vision and goals.

As you present your proposal, be realistic about how you plan to finance the program, how much time you are willing to give, and how much administrative, as in secretarial, support you expect to need. Presenting this in a well thought out plan will make it clear whether you can gain the support you need to accomplish your vision in the near-term or if you may need to revise your hopes, dreams and wishes to gain your desired outcomes in the future.

Do not hesitate to talk with others who have successfully gained support from their institutions. Call (877) PAIRS-4U x802 for referrals. They can be an invaluable resource as you create your plan. Ask for feedback and suggestions before you submit it.

If you receive a positive response from your supervisor, congratulations! If you receive a conditional “Yes,” or a “No,” identify barriers and if your boss is open to an alternative proposal.

If you feel led to make this happen for your Veterans, continue to believe in yourself and your vision, create a team that will help you stay inspired, positive, and engaged over the long haul, accept that there may be bumps in the road, but keep looking for those who will support your efforts in the belief that you will find a way to make it work.
Funding

Funding is essential to hosting a workshop, class or retreat. The amount of funds needed can vary significantly.

- With donated space, equipment, and instructors provided pro bono, classes can be held for the cost of materials and FTEE. Some sites have held retreats/workshops in local communities of faith, with the community of faith providing the meals and space, leaving the VA to only provide materials and leadership.
- On the other hand, a retreat held in a resort, hotel, spa setting for 2-½ days from a Friday evening through late Sunday afternoon with the provision of meals, an on-site conference planner, rental of sound and video equipment, parking fees, and room rental can cost up to $500 per person, plus FTEE.

VA Mental Health and Chaplaincy will be releasing an evaluation report that provide data related to cost of conducting a W2SM program.

Securing Funding

How to secure funding is a key issue. Future sustainment will depend primarily upon funding at the VISN and local facility level. Considerations to remember:

- VISN support
- Local facility budgets
- Outside funding, i.e., California, funds from the Prevention and Early intervention initiative have also been provided
- Voluntary Services and VSOs
- Grants

VA Centers are not allowed to directly solicit external funds. However, if there are organizations or corporations who wish to fund retreats or classes for Veterans and Active Duty personnel VA’s might consider providing certified instructors. Of course, Voluntary Services can receive funds from those who would like to support VA programming.

Important considerations when developing funding include:

- All funding must be consistent with VA regulations and the policies.
- Writing requests within the VA that meet the mission of the funding arm being approached is key.
- Finding a third party who wishes to serve as a funding site is yet another means to financial support.
- Some organizations, such as communities of faith, may believe so passionately about the value of the W2SM program and the PAIRS model that they are willing to provide meals, space or childcare as well as be solicitors of funds for the program, something the VA cannot do for itself.
When submitting a formal grant request, ask the funding source how specific your proposal should be in terms of listing line items to be covered. Some may not require much more than a general program description and statement that any expenses related to the support of that program will be eligible for funding.

On the other hand, specifying such items as food and lodging, handbooks, audio visual purchase or rental, other electronic equipment, salary reimbursement or hiring staff, production costs, room rental, parking, contracts with PAIRS for Train the Trainer or couples retreats, Internship fees, travel, your target audience and if childcare will be covered may save many misunderstandings and questions if the grant is authorized.

It may be helpful to specify that funding will cover both participants and instructors, and to clarify which participants in the Train the Trainer program will be covered and which may need to pay for their own registration, food or other costs.

Finally, it’s important to provide funding sources with a written report on programs shortly after completion. Thank you letters from program participants and a summary of outcome evaluations can be helpful to include.
Contracting vs. Purchase Card

Some components of the W2SM program can be provided through your local budget and secured through a purchase card transaction. These items may include PAIRS Essentials participant books, accreditation fees, and food/snacks. Follow local guidelines for use of purchase card and local approvals.

In some cases you will need to utilize your local contracting office. If you are not familiar with the VA contracting process, find a good friend in financial services to guide you through the contracting process.

Suggestions and considerations when submitting contracts:

- Submit contract requests, i.e., Form 2237, early as it can take more than 90 days to establish a purchase order!
- If possible, get to know your contracting officer on a personal basis.
- Be patient … contracting can be complex and extensive.
- You cannot use a “vendor” until that vendor has been “vendorized” (Each vendor must complete an application to be reviewed and authenticated by the VA. Once completed, usually within a week, it does not need to be repeated).
- Preference may be given to small businesses, Veteran owned businesses, women owned businesses, and non-profits.
- If you are wishing to secure a hotel, retreat center, convention planner, or other contracted services, you may need to request your contracting office to let a bid for similar providers (typically 90 days, check local times and considerations).
- Finally, you may be able to obligate funds into the next fiscal year by establishing a contract for services in this fiscal year which continues into the next. Be advised that obligating funds and securing a sole source provider are often difficult to negotiate.

NOTE: As of August 2012, significant questions regarding what funds may be spent, including food and lodging, have been clarified. See APPENDIX.

PAIRS Foundation is a Sole Source Provider

The PAIRS Foundation, Inc. is a sole-source provider of PAIRS Certification Training, PAIRS licensing, and PAIRS materials such as handbooks, wallet cards and supplemental teaching materials for PAIRS Essentials and other PAIRS programs. See APPENDIX for example of a Sole Source Contract. Information you will need to submit to request materials or training from PAIRS includes:

The PAIRS Foundation, Inc.
200 S. Park Road, Suite 455, Hollywood, Florida 33021
Phone: (877) 724-7748 x802 • Fax: (954) 206-0281 • E-mail: info@pairs.com
Federal Tax ID: 52-1327867 • DUNS: 839942422 • CCR: 3Z8H5
Publicity and Referral

As you prepare any publicity, always check with your Public Affairs Officer first. Also, realize you will have to have contracts, if need, in place before you can advertise.

Good publicity can be the lifeblood of your W2SM program.

- Target audience and size.
- How many couples you accept for an event should be determined prior to advertising, which should indicate that applications will be limited.
- As you determine how many couples to accept, consider the size of your meeting room, budget, number of instructors available, emotional maturity and intensity of the issues for the couples who will be coming, and the amount of program support you have.
- Clarify target audience - Veterans, Active Duty, Guard and Reserve.
- Screening considerations
  - In a committed relationship for 6 months or longer
  - No domestic violence in the past 6 months
  - Authorization to contact both parties
  - Others as determined by your local team
- Advertisement
  - Tri-fold brochure (contact other facilities with existing programs for examples)
  - VA electronic bulletin board
  - Announcements at leadership meetings
  - Announcements to community organizations supporting Veterans and Active Duty causes
  - E-mail announcements with PDF brochure attachments to VA employees, OEF/OIF Network Coordinators, faith community clergy, DoD chaplains and Family Readiness Officer

Please note that you may wish to state on the brochure that this is an “application,” not a registration process. Those applying may be told they will need to complete a screening process once they apply.

For retreats, brochures may also note that the weekend will be alcohol, drug and weapons free. Those applying are also advised they are expected to come on time and stay through the conclusion of the program.
Recruitment

- Reading and distributing letters from enthusiastic class or retreat participants is another effective way to gain support for and develop a referral network.

- Over time, you may develop a distribution list of key people to be notified of scheduled retreats or classes.

- Publicity is an important consideration to support recruitment before and after your program.

- PAIRS Foundation will provide a username/password for licensed instructors to freely post events on the national website, which typically receives 1000-2000 views daily, along with a brief bio and contract information for your program. For an example, see consumer.pairs.com.

- You may wish to consider making a video of the results of your program with actual interviews of couples you served. This can be a powerful promotional tool in the future for your geographic area, featuring your facility with your staff and the couples you served.

- In late April 2014 a video produced by the OPCC&CT will be available nationally.

- You can review existing videos from the links below and then contact your local or VISN media services or public affairs office. (www.augusta.va.gov/OEF_OIF_Marriage_Enrichment_Retreats.asp and www.sandiego.va.gov/publicaffairs/index.aspairs).
Consult Process

An August 2013 memo from the Deputy Undersecretary’s Office states that referrals to the PAIRS program should be through the consult process. The Veteran must go through their provider, who submits a consult to the office coordinating WtSM programming, often the Chaplain’s office. To determine the appropriate fit for individuals or couples is important, to find which venue will be most productive – individual consultation, a small class, larger group, or retreat. Issues you may wish to consider in a consult process are the following:

- Length of the current relationship.
- Desire to stay in a committed relationship.
- Active alcohol or drug abuse/addiction.
- Untreated or current domestic violence in which one partner seeks to establish power and control over the other through physical, emotional, psychological, financial, sexual, or other tactics.
- Mental health/emotional issues preventing focus and ability to process cognitive input or intense feelings.
- History of emotional triggers resulting in assaultive or aggressive behavior easily activated.

If there is a question of the suitability of an applicant, it is suggested that a multi-disciplinary team of at least three people review any screening tool and consider a face to face interview. Again the emphasis is to get the curriculum to the couple in the most appropriate setting. There may be situations in which it is felt that the couple is not ready for this experiential emotional work and would be best served by engaging in couple’s or individual therapy first and then, as the therapist feels the couple or individual is ready, apply at a later time for a retreat.
Administrative Support

Like every great endeavor, conducting W2SM programs takes a team. A key component will be administrative support. Several options may be considered in establishing administrative support:

- Recruit a paid Program Support Assistant ("PSA")
- Recruit a Volunteer PSA
- Utilize current administrative support in your area or within your facility

Program Support Assistants should be familiar with the W2SM program and the PAIRS Essentials curriculum. Ideally, they have completed PAIRS Essentials training or participated in prior W2SM retreat/workshop/class in order to:

- Understand and model the values of the W2SM program and the PAIRS curriculum.
- Essential qualities include: reliable, well organized, quick learner, self-starter, proficient with relevant software applications, know the VA contracting system, and can competently use the VA process for ordering supplies.

Duties and responsibilities:

- Execute work orders for the completion of brochures, order handbooks and other supplies in a timely manner.
- Distribute marketing materials, coordinate publicity, work with the public.
- Create and maintain distribution lists of prospects and instructors.
- Execute 2237’s as needed for lodging, food, room rentals, etc.
- Familiar with and assist when needed with room set-up, including audio, video and projection equipment when utilized.
- Receive and log applicant information, verify eligibility, answer questions by phone, e-mail, or in person at preview events.
- Track registrations against available slots.
- Send out welcome or declining letters.
- develop and maintain a waiting list.
- Coordinator concerns with program leader.
- Tabulating pre- and post-retreat feedback forms, evaluations, and compiling data, which may involve typing or scanning from the free text evaluations to be used in reports and for future publicity and evaluation of the program.
Certified Instructors

Utilization of the PAIRS Essentials curriculum in the W2SM program requires that individuals be certified. Two avenues currently exist for certification of VA employee, volunteers and Veterans:

- Certification workshops conducted by VA staff
  Contact - Clyde Angel (clyde.angel@va.gov) or Dick Millspaugh (dick.millspaugh@va.gov)
- Cost - $500 per participant – includes PAIRS certification and training material
- Travel, lodging and per diem for instructors
- Other local cost associated with conducting the workshop
- Contact NCC Liaison for the W2SM program for further details
- Certification workshop conducted by PAIRS Foundation
  (Contact PAIRS Foundation directly for costs and scheduling.)

Additional considerations related to certified instructors:

- Attention should be paid to the instructors invited to lead classes or retreats. The class or retreat will only be successful to the degree that effective, certified instructors are creating group safety and rapport with participants throughout the process of delivering the curriculum. See page 21 for qualities of effective instructors.

- The number of certified instructors needed to present a class or retreat will depend upon the experience of the instructors, the number of persons present and the level of distress in the relationships of the participants. In general consider one certified instructor for every 8 people plus at least one certified person to coordinate the overall event. As a rule of thumb there should always be at least two instructors present.

- A male and female instructor are asked to be on call during retreats. If they are called during the night, they should have record of each participant’s mentor. Participants can be given the number of the desk or operator for the facility they are staying in to reach the operator on call. The desk person or operator would have the name and contact number of the person on call.

- Each participant will need a PAIRS Handbook and wallet cards which can be ordered from PAIRS Foundation at (877) 724-7748 ext 802 or with an instructor login to access pairsusa.com. Be sure to allow enough time (four to six weeks is recommended) to receive handbooks prior to the beginning of your session.
Thank you for serving as a lead instructor for the Warrior to Soul Mate program. Below are guidelines which you may find helpful as you prepare to lead your team through a class or weekend.

**GENERAL THOUGHTS**

1. Remember that the PAIRS curriculum is excellent; trust the curriculum to speak for itself.

2. Encourage instructors to be transparent, using appropriate personal examples.

3. Caution instructors not to use long examples or illustrations that overpower the curriculum.

4. Help instructors focus on general themes throughout their teaching and to return to them often for emphasis. Those themes are:
   a. The Relationship Road Map. General Question: Which side of the Relationship Road does this (making assumptions, dirty fighting, thinking that the other’s love language is the same as ours, love knots, etc.) put us on?
   b. Good Will and the Good Will Umbrella (Caring, Communication, Commitment and Change): Good will is our desire, intention and action to practice kindness toward others. Good will is to intend the best good for the other.
   c. Empathy. “Empathy is our ability to identify with or experience the feelings, thoughts or attitudes of another person.”
   d. Compassion. “Compassion is the expression of our desire to alleviate suffering.”
   e. Bonding. Bonding is “our human need for the combination of emotional openness and physical closeness in intimate, adult relationship.” (PAIRS Essentials Handbook, page 9.)
   f. Working for the Relationship. PAIRS encourages couples to see each other as partners to work on relationship issues, not as enemies who need to be conquered. If one person loses, the relationship loses.

5. Safety. Do all that you can to create an environment of safety. Safety is built in increments. One dimension that increases safety is predictability. Have you helped couples and your instructors know what is expected? What will happen? When? Where? How? Why? Have you given couples and instructors enough lead time to be able to anticipate, adjust, and respond to what you are expecting of them? Have you put your expectations in writing?

6. Team Building. As lead instructor you will be building the presentation team. A balance of genders, ages, ethnicities, and disciplines is an important nonverbal affirmation that all participants are welcomed. Assigning teams of two to do the teaching of curriculum segments helps build the team and lets members know they are not alone in their presentation.

7. Modeling. As the lead instructor, you team members will naturally look to you to model what is the attitude and behavior of choice. Your willingness to serve in the lead position
already says a lot about your commitment to the PAIRS model, your desire to put in the extra work needed for great outcomes. You can add to this contribution by being aware that every interaction you have with your team will tend to be replicated by your team with your couples. Your hospitality and personal attention to your team, calling each person by name, listening and responding to their concerns, and your enthusiasm and belief in the PAIRS curriculum will help ensure your teams’ positive attitude and behavior with couples.

8. Time. As lead instructor it is your responsibility to keep the meeting on time. Keeping to your prescribed schedule assures each instructor that they will have time for their presentation and provides participants with an assurance that someone is in control. Appoint a couple instructors to also serve as the time keepers, when they are not instructing. During their assignments, time keepers can stand at the back of the room and display a 4 X 6 card with “5”, “3” and “1” to presenters to let them know how many minutes remain for their segment. Participants will also be looking for regular breaks, which should be indicated on their agenda. Keeping the retreat on time also means letting participants know at the meals that “We will be meeting in 10 minutes.” Ask instructors to help get this word out regularly for all meals.

9. Rehearsal. Lead instructors should require instructors to meet prior to a retreat or class to rehearse. Walking through the presentations will help instructors gain confidence and work out bugs. If you are using a sound system, be sure to test that out at this time. Many of our Veterans have hearing issues and a sound system can be an invaluable asset. However, many of our Veterans suffer from PTSD and an unintended blast of feedback from a sound system can trigger flashbacks and cause a Veteran to need to leave the presentation.

Instructors should be encouraged to provide supportive feedback during the rehearsal to
each other, sharing other possible options, as long as no one person dominates the conversation. As lead instructor you need to catch what might be problematic during the rehearsal. For example, are the presenters turning to face the projection screen and not the audience? Are presenters making good eye contact? Are the presenters projecting their voice? Do the presenters have nervous habits that are distracting from their presentation? Are the presenters basically reading their presentation, without enthusiasm or excitement?

10. Debriefing. As lead instructor you are responsible to call the instructors together after every major segment to do a debriefing. What went well? What could have gone better? What adjustments do we need to make mid-stream?

11. Safeguard All. Be aware that one person or couple may tend to dominate the conversations or questions. You may handle this is several ways. In your general introduction of ground rules, when you state that no one will be forced to speak, you can also add that instructors will, on the other hand, try to assure that there is space for everyone who wishes to speak. If during the class or retreat you become aware of one person tending to dominate the conversation, you may redirect them, by stating, “Before we hear Bob’s comment I want to make sure that those of you who need a little more time to formulate your comments or questions have that time. (Pause). Now that you have had a moment do you have a question or comment.” Or, “I want to take Bob’s question or comment in a moment, but before I do, who has not spoken yet and would like to make a comment or ask a question.” Or, make up your own statement and just be prepared to use it as it is very common for some people to be more comfortable speaking in public and some people may have more of a need to speak more often.

12. Use Your Mentor. Encourage couples to use their mentors, and if they don’t feel like their mentor is a good fit for them, encourage them to seek out another mentor.

13. Avoid Gendered Comments. It is tempting to generalize about men do this or women do that. Work hard to avoid these generalizations as there is a wide variety of characteristics among any gender. Generalizing can leave people feeling left out, strange or like something must be wrong with them.

14. Avoid Advancing Your Own Agenda. We often have strong feelings about certain aspects of our lives whether it is religion, politics, sexual orientation, child raising practices or who is the best team. Remember that you have the privilege of being a certified instructor. People will often give your opinion extra weight. Therefore it is not appropriate to use this privilege to promote your point of view on personal matters. The sole purpose of your being a W2SM instructor is to be a W2SM instructor. Honor the PAIRS curriculum and maintain the fidelity of the program.

15. Have Fun. Remember to enjoy your work. Have fun. What you are doing is a blessing for many. Thank you!
Qualities of an Effective Instructor

Overall the WtSM facilitator should be personable, have life experience, and be trustworthy, responsible, and caring.

The instructor should be someone who does not read the material off the printed page or PowerPoint in class; a person who has a sense of humor, healthy self-esteem, charisma, energy, enthusiasm, and life wisdom.

The qualities listed below have been found to be common characteristics of effective W2SM instructors.

- Personal warmth, optimism, authenticity, poise, and maturity
- Speaks clearly with appropriate pacing and expression, and is easily understood
- Emotionally stable and comfortable with emotional intensity
- Appropriate professional appearance and grooming
- Relevant and appropriate self-disclosure
- Avoids wordiness, professional jargon, terminology
- Ability to maintain a safe educational environment, including appropriate boundaries
- Use of appropriate humor
- At ease with groups and establishing group rapport
- Works cooperatively with staff and team members
- Authentically models curriculum tools and values
- Avoids inappropriate comments or offensive behavior
- Knowledge of the curriculum and its intended purpose
- Provides clear and accurate direction
- Stays within boundaries and topics of each class
- Effectively teaches existing curriculum content as it is written
- Covers all required material and exercises within time allowed
- Knowledge, understanding, and adherence to Ethical Practices
- Asks for help when needed
- Appropriately evaluates and reads participant responses
- Fully prepared for each class with clear, organized presentations
- Handles transitions effectively
- Understands and respects the vulnerabilities of class participants
- Identifies and recommends improvements based on group feedback
- Receives positive evaluations from class participants
Mentors on Site

During the retreat or class, be sure to make a point of meeting your couples early in the event, introduce yourself, warmly welcome them, and let them know you are available to them during the entire retreat. Let them also know that they can ask any of the mentors for help, that’s OK. You may have some feel prior to the retreat as to how distressed the couple is, but your personal introduction is another time to get a sense for their level of comfort with each other. This is important to know as it may indicate how much support you may need to provide during the event.

The Distressed Couples

A key leadership and mentoring function is to be scanning couples to determine those who are experiencing distress. You will note this almost immediately when they come. Are they holding hands, or do they seem to keep distant from each other? Do they smile at each other in a natural, warm way, or are do smiles seemed forced? Do they give each other warm eye contact or is eye contact with a challenge or event hostile? Do they volunteer cheerfully to help each other, or is each partner on their own? Do they laugh together, or are there remarks that seem to be loaded with indirect or direct hostility. When they sit together, do they touch, hold hands, seem to enjoy being with each other or do they turn away from each other and seem to avoid physical contact? Do they engage in light and spontaneous conversation, or do they speak little and mostly about the necessities? When they eat, do they sit together, is there tension or a free flow of talking? Do they tend to engage more with other couples or equally between themselves and others?

As the workshop proceeds, notice how couples either move toward or away from each other. For the most part couples will tend to use the exercises to open up emotionally and move toward each other. For distressed couples the opening may bring issues and feelings to the surface that are uncomfortable. A key place to watch for how distressed a couple may be is during Talking Tips. Be very observant during this exercise and be ready to gently intervene.

One way to think about intervening is to remember the acronym ACORRN (p23).
Participants will often show signs of connection or distance.

A Attend to. Assess the couples in the room. Watch for tears with some sign of distress – body language which seems defensive. Tears can be a clear sign of engagement, tenderness, bonding, so be aware to read other signs. Look for couples who are not talking at all, who seem to be stuck. Are they not in the leveling position?

C Contact. If you believe a couple is in distress, approach them to make contact. Kneel or sit beside them. Listen briefly if they continue talking, to help you continue to assess if they are experiencing distress.

O Observe. Make an observation in a direct, neutral, non judgmental way. “This seems to be hard for you.” “It looks like you are finding some pain in this exercise.”

R Response. Wait for response from one or both of the partners. If only one responds, judge if you should ask the other, “And how is it going for you?”

R Redirect. Often distressed couples fall out of the template for doing an exercise and get caught in old habits of communication, finding it difficult to follow the step by step pattern before them. It may be helpful to encourage them to start over, but this time with your help and your guidance. “It seems that this became more difficult when you got off track on the process here, would you be willing to start over with my help?”

N Navigate through the steps one at a time, helping the couple stay on track. And begin the process again, i.e., Assess – did this help? If yes, congratulate the couple and ask them to share appreciations. If not, maintain contact, decide if some form of follow up may be of interest to the couple.
The following are suggested guidelines for you as you serve as a mentor to the couples who will be attending the marriage enrichment retreat. You will be assigned several couples to mentor during the entire retreat.

1. Be a welcoming presence for your couples.
2. Ask what each person prefers to be called. Learn each person’s name and call them by name.
3. While being available to the couples, be respectful of boundaries and their privacy. While being friendly, your job is not to intrude upon their space, not to push yourself upon them, not to seek out personal information. At the most basic level, your job is to be available, to be a good listener, to observe to see if there are ways you can unobtrusively offer help.
4. As you gain a couple’s trust, be alert for signals or invitations to be of help and respond by first asking if what you believe is being asked is truly the case.
5. Be alert as to how you can be helpful to any couple or mentor. You are not required to only help those couples you have been assigned to. Some couples may naturally ask you questions or drift to seeking your help. Then it is appropriate to be helpful.
6. Don’t be territorial. If someone else is able to be helpful to a couple that you have been assigned, that will give you more time to be helpful to someone else.

7. Do not hesitate to call on another instructor (mentor) to assist you in working with a couple’s emergency. Don’t try to deal with tough issues alone.

8. Make sure you have the after hours contact info on the other mentors/instructors available to call on them if needed.

9. You will be asked to sign your couples’ “graduation” certificate. You may list an office phone number here if you wish.

10. Do not provide personal contact information. Though you may grow close to couples in a brief weekend, it is not appropriate to use this venue to develop personal friendships. You are serving in a privileged position as a leader/mentor that is not to be used for developing personal friendships.

PAIRS Foundation’s rigorous ethical standards are founded on the recognition that every action of program leadership can have a significant impact on class participants. It’s important to regularly review the Ethical Standards for the PAIRS Provider and ensure that anyone class members perceive as a program representative knows and adheres to those requirements.
Date and Time

Selecting a date, time and place sometimes are hand in glove. Selecting a date and time to give your contracting agent will limit those places that are available to bid for your preferred calendar. On the other hand, hoping that your contracting agent will be able to gain a competitive bid from one of your favorite sites will limit the dates available for you to choose from. It will be important to work with your contracting agent early and often around these issues. (See contracting on page 11.)

Meeting Room or Site

You will need a meeting room if you are conducting classes or a site with a meeting room if you are conducting retreats. The room should be large enough to accommodate chairs in theater style, with space for participants to move and have some privacy to do the exercises. Setting chairs in pairs with some space between each will help create a sense of respect and intimacy. You will need room and ceiling height enough for a video projector and screen. In addition you will want to have space, ideally just outside the meeting room, for welcome, registration and resource information.

There are many options for finding meeting space. Your VA hospital, VA clinic or Vet Center may have availability depending upon the time of your meeting. Veterans Service Organizations (VSO’s) such as American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) and Disabled American Veterans frequently have space available for programs. Communities of faith are also natural partners that may welcome your class or retreat. Local libraries, colleges, civic centers, Red Cross, or other non-profit organizations may provide other options. Some may require a fee and others may offer meeting space free of charge.

Finding space for a retreat, which may go 1 ½, 2 or 2 ½ days, may require more preparation. Some states have retreat centers which offer a low cost option compared to hotels or resorts and spas. However some hotels and resorts or spas do offer government rates and the privacy of being in a gracious setting is often deeply appreciated by couples.

Some retreat coordinators find it helpful to use a convention planner to find the best hotel or resort and spa for given specifications and dates. This can be done at no direct cost to you as the hotel or resort will pay the convention planner a percentage of the gross cost. The convention planner can often negotiate special concessions. If you plan several retreats at the same hotel, your convention planner may be able to negotiate additional concessions. If you decide you would like to work with a convention planner, you should start early as you will probably have to ask your Network Logistics Office to get a bid for a planner.
Evaluation Tools

Evaluation of each W2SM program provided through the VA can make future programming even more successful. It also will assist in maintain the fidelity of the PAIRS curriculum.

Suggestions:

• It’s helpful for instructors to debrief after each class to consider what went well and opportunities for improvement, and to review feedback provided by participants in their end-of-class evaluations

• The PAIRS model has been extensively researched and is an evidence and outcomes-based educational intervention. PAIRS Relationship Education Impact Reports, September 2011, provide findings from a five-year, federally-sponsored research and demonstration project. See evaluation.pairs.com for more information (see PAIRS Instructors training manual)

• Contact VA facilities who are currently conducting W2SM program

The Office of Patient Centered Care and Cultural Transformation and the VA Mental Health and Chaplaincy program are conducting a national evaluation of the W2SM program. That report is anticipated for release in FY 2014.
Welcoming/Declining Letters

Once a couple has passed your consult process, they should receive a welcome letter thanking them for their application and detailing confirmation of their acceptance for the retreat. The letter should contain information on the location and time of the retreat, attire, and what people should bring. It is good to restate that the weekend is alcohol, drug and firearms free. Note should be made as to whether childcare is provided, and if so, at whose expense. See page 26 for an example of a welcome letter.

From time to time you may need to write a letter declining a couple’s attendance at a retreat because of active domestic abuse or neglect, active alcohol or drug addiction, or significant mental health issues. Such letters need to be clearly written to avoid any confusion or legal consequences. Always the intent should be to find a way to get the couple the curriculum experience. If they are not suited for a retreat or large group setting, can you work with them in a small group of couples or one-on-one? The emphasis should be on working with the couple to get them the curriculum experience. See page APPENDIX for an example of a letter of declination.

Schedules and Formats

A schedule of your presentation is essential in conducting a class or retreat. A schedule allows assignments of instructors to specific content to be covered, provides a guide by which time can be maintained, and is helpful to hotels or retreat centers in planning breaks and meals in a retreat setting.

PAIRS Essentials may be presented in various formats including a 1½-day, 2-day, or 2 ½-day retreat to include all the content in one setting; a 60-90 minutes per session schedule over six to ten weeks; or three hours per session over three weeks. Some have successfully delivered the program into an intensive day and a half seminar, leaving less time for reflection and absorption of the materials during the program itself. See APPENDIX for sample schedules and formats.
VA requires documentation of enrolled Veterans attendance in retreats and classes in the Computerized Patient Record System (CPRS). This will require recording the Veteran’s name and his or her social security number last four digits in order to ensure accurate completion of the patient record. Of course this is secure information and needs to be treated as such. It is highly preferred that this information be secured during your application/registration process with any sensitive data being secured within your VA facility, following standard security procedures.

If you wish to retain records of attendees and their contact information, you must keep all personal identification information secure! Check with your Information Security Officer to verify you plan for securing such information is consistent with VA policy. VA employees are specifically directed to follow the provisions in VA handbook 6500, Appendix D, issued September 20, 2012. **A copy of that is provided in the APPENDIX.**

If for any reason you require the capability to store, transport, and utilize VA sensitive information outside protected environments, as defined by VA Directive and Handbook 6500, off-site including off site locations, it must be secured at all times, including transfer to be secured on site. All such procedures for obtaining, storing, transporting and utilizing sensitive information must be approved and authorized as per your facility’s policy. Please contact your Information Security Officer for guidance on obtaining the required approval.

The PAIRS Foundation’s Instructor Licensing Agreement requires a Participant Agreement (Informed Consent) and end of course evaluation be provided from each participant in PAIRS programs as part of the organization’s commitment to continuous quality management. Participants in VA programs may voluntarily provide their name and contact information to PAIRS Foundation on these forms or only the last four of their social security number, although PAIRS reacquires that the informed consent itself must be signed. Paperwork should be send to the PAIRS Foundation by mail or fax within three business days of program conclusion.
Equipment/Supplies

A packet of materials might be compiled as follows: each participant will need a PAIRS Essential handbook and wallet cards. In addition to that, a brief agenda will be helpful to participants listing basic presentations, breaks and meal times. You do not need to hand out an extensive agenda like that which instructors might receive. You will probably need to adapt the time line as you go along and a detailed agenda will only be confusing to participants.

A post retreat evaluation form and a free text evaluation form may also be included in the packet. It will be helpful, as well, to include contact information regarding the services your facility provides, including counseling referral services in your organization and the community.

At the registration table you may wish to hand out pre-retreat feedback forms and consent forms to be completed. You should have ground rules forms for those who have not returned them, if you sent them out ahead of time. Encourage couples not to sit together when filling out the pre-retreat feedback forms so they do not compare answers.

The packets to be given out at registration might include:

1. Handbook and Wallet Cards
2. Brief Agenda
3. Post-retreat feedback form *(page 42)*
4. Free Text evaluation forms
5. W2SM brochure
6. 3x5 cards for mentors to collect contact info
7. List of services your organization provides (or organization brochure)
8. Counseling referral list

In addition, at registration you may ask participants to complete and turn in:

1. Pre-retreat feedback form *(page 40)*
2. Consent form *(page 38)*
3. Ground Rules form (found in the handbook)
4. 3x5 cards to enter SSN
5. Pens

Depending upon your setting and location your may need additional supplies:

1. Sound system – Supplies and hand held microphones for larger groups
2. Projection Screen to show PowerPoint
3. Video Projector
4. Laptop computer with W2SM PowerPoint
5. Larger Pointer
6. PAIRS Posters
7. White boards or easels with newsprint, free standing
8. Dry erase and/or markers  
9. Extension Cords, power strip  
10. Duct Tape to secure cord(s)  
11. 3x5 cards  
12. Bell or chime to signal starting times  
13. Batteries  
14. Extra Bulb for Projector  
15. Pens  

Conclusion  

Creating a W2SM program is an exciting venture rewarded by a couple’s experiencing an increase in the quality of their relationships.

Keep in mind to:  
• Take the process one step at a time  
• Begin with what is easiest and right before you  
• Keep the 10,000 foot view in mind  
• Ask for help  
• Helping couples rediscover their care and concern for each other is more than enough reward for the work at hand.  

For additional support or to address other questions, please reach out to:  

• **Chaplain Clyde Angel**  
  National Chaplain Center Liaison for the Warrior to Soul Mate Program  
  Phone: 317-988-4187 Email: clyde.angel@va.gov  

• **Chaplain Dick Millsapugh – San Diego, CA**  
  Chief, Chaplain Services - VA San Diego Healthcare System  
  Phone: 858-552-7599 Email: dick.millsapugh@va.gov  

• **Chaplain Ron Craddock – Augusta, GA**  
  Chief of Chaplain Services - Charlie Norwood VA Medical Center  
  Phone: 706-733-0188 Ext: 6114 Email: ronald.craddock@va.gov  

• **Chaplain Juliana Lesher - San Antonio, TX**  
  Chief of Chaplain Services - South Texas Veterans Health Care System  
  Phone: 210-617-5300, ext. 15439 Email: Juliana.Lesher@va.gov  

• **Chaplain Sue Cross – Hampton, VA**  
  Chief, Chaplain Services - Hampton VA Medical Center  
  Phone: 757-722-9961 Ext 3601 Email: susan.cross@va.gov
VA Mission

To fulfill President Lincoln’s promise “To care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan” by serving and honoring the men and women who are America’s Veterans.