

PREPARE ENRICH

• *building strong marriages* •

Relationship Dynamics

The “Relationship Dynamics” scales in PREPARE/ENRICH assess four personal and interpersonal dynamics: **assertiveness**, **self-confidence**, **avoidance**, and **partner dominance**. These scales were designed to increase the Facilitator’s understanding of individuals and how these characteristics are related to underlying couple dynamics.

Assertiveness – is a person’s ability to express their thoughts, feelings, and opinions to their partner and to be able to ask for what they want in a manner that is both honest and respectful.

Self-Confidence – focuses on how good a person feels about himself/herself and his or her feeling of control in life.

Avoidance – measures a person’s tendency to minimize issues and their reluctance in dealing with issues directly.

Partner Dominance – focuses on how much a person feels their partner tries to control and/or dominate their relationship.

How Do Happy and Unhappy Couples Score in These Areas?

PREPARE/ENRICH research has found that happy couples tend to score high in assertiveness and self-confidence, and low in avoidance and partner dominance. Conversely, the tendency for unhappy couples is for one or both individuals to be low in assertiveness and self-confidence, and high in avoidance and partner dominance.

How Are the Four Scales Interrelated?

There is a positive cycle linking assertiveness and self-confidence and a negative cycle linking avoidance and partner dominance.

- In the **positive cycle**, as a person uses more assertiveness, their level of self-confidence tends to increase. As a person’s self-confidence increases, their willingness and ability to be more assertive increases.
- In the **negative cycle**, when one person perceives their partner as dominating, a common reaction is for that person to avoid dealing with issues. As a person uses more avoidance, they will often perceive more dominance in their partner.

Relevance of the Relationship Dynamics Scale with other areas of the Report

The four Relationship Dynamic scales are very relevant to other categories within PREPARE/ENRICH. Individuals, for example, who are more assertive tend to like the personality of their partner (Partner Styles and Habits), feel good about their communication (Communication) and report satisfaction in their abilities to resolve conflict (Conflict Resolution). Conversely, those who are high on avoidance tend to dislike the personality of their partner, dislike their communication, and report dissatisfaction in their abilities to resolve conflict.

The Relationship Dynamic scale is also strongly linked with background characteristics related to alcohol and drug use, as well as various types of abuse. Individuals and couples with high scores in avoidance and partner dominance tend to be at a greater risk for drug and alcohol use as well as physical, emotional, and sexual abuse.

Can Relationship Dynamics change?

Yes. These four traits are learned and can, therefore, be unlearned. The positive and negative cycles demonstrate that patterns of relating are malleable and that increasing behaviors in the positive cycle (e.g. assertiveness) can weaken behaviors in the negative cycle (e.g. avoidance). The feedback process and exercises in the Couple's Workbook help couples explore Relationship Dynamics through awareness of their own and their partner's current styles and then help each person practice and strengthen assertiveness.

**For more information please see Chapter 5 in the Facilitator's Manual*

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