

Gottman Community @ SG



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Introduction

“The strength of a nation derives from the integrity of the home.”

Confucius

"Being deeply loved by someone gives you strength, while loving someone deeply gives you courage."

Lao Tzu

Family relationships are in crisis and marriages are under tremendous stress. It is not some new phenomenon to many, but it is also pervasive, undermining the very core of what we hold as the basic unit of society. Values such as trust, love, sacrifice and commitment underpin the creation of families, communities and society. The disregard of these values in this generation leads to the rejection of next.

The percentage of divorces in the West ranges from 40% to more than 55%. In 2015, the Department of Statistics in Singapore reported an increase in the number of divorces, from 7,307 in 2014 to 7,522 in 2015. In that report, it was apparent to us that in 2015, for every four celebrations in the Registry of Marriages, there was one that ends in the courts.

Of greater interest to us, the numbers of divorces in 2015, compared to 2005, saw an increase of 12%. Marriages are also ending earlier with most divorces coming from marriages lasting less than 10 years, and their median ages 41-43 for males, and 37-39 for females.

We commend the Ministry of Family and Social Development's attempt to stem this trend by rolling out new initiatives like the 'Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Programme' (PREP), in May 2015, engaging soon-to-wed couples in marriage preparation programmes. The move for services to go upstream has been something EMCC had advocated, and is a move in the right direction.

There are several implications in the statistics mentioned above about the state of marriages in Singapore. We infer that with marriages lasting less than 10 years, there are more children below 10 years old that are seeing their parents split. Given couples divorcing younger, in their late 30s and early 40s, we have also noted an upward trend on remarriages. If the United States were any indicator to look at, the divorce rates of first, second and third remarriages are 50%, 67% and 73% respectively. On the home front, 1 in 10 divorces in 2015 were by couples who were married at least once before. Indeed, some of these have direct practice implications for us as professionals, practitioners and eventually policymakers.

We also have to start conversations about blended families, and the issues that surround them. We will see families where siblings may have different parents, cultures and norms, put together by the virtue of a remarriage. How do we support these families emotionally? Social work issues surrounding safety, space are conversations that will be raised.

There are many questions, but at EMCC we believe that if we answer some pertinent ones surrounding marriages, many of these answers will naturally fall into place.

Response by EMCC (Eagles Mediation & Counselling Centre)

EMCC has had the privilege of helping individuals, couples and families through our services of mediation and counselling for the last 20 years, bringing hope to relationships.

Especially in the last 3 years, EMCC has seen an increase in the number of marital cases. Currently, 58% of our cases were marriage or marital-work related, from marriage therapy to extra-marital affairs. This, coupled with an upswing in divorces rates in our society, crossing the 7000 divorces cases annually, began to concern us. It was compelling for us to work on repairing and strengthening marriages to prevent a greater fallout, and build resiliency in families.

In the last 3 years, EMCC saw the need to set upstream, psycho-educational and training programmes that seeks to enrich marriages, preserving their union and fortifying it. This was also the birth of EMCC's Marriage Journey pillar.

It became obvious to us that while we had a very well-received, researched and validated therapeutic framework in the Gottman Method, we had to put in place robust measures both in intervention and at preventive work to impact the increasing number of divorces where possible.

Firstly, we have incorporated the use of a measure called Feedback Informed Treatment (FIT), a process of receiving feedback from our clients with the express purpose of building a culture of feedback so as to build a mindset of professional excellence.

Secondly, our integrative services of mediation and counselling help our clients to move through both services seamlessly often helping divorcing couples retain their friendship and begin to focus on their new roles in co-parenting.

Thirdly, EMCC's decision to focus on preventive work is a natural, ethical and informed response to the social needs raised at the point of our clinical interventions. The scope of our work in the Marriage Journey is to help couples work intentionally to achieve a satisfying and meaningful marriage.

The Gottman Method, built upon 40 years of empirical and longitudinal research, case studies and professional experience, was chosen because of its scientific robustness and rigour. With the evidence from our statistics and divorce trends, we knew we needed to embark on a collaboration with the experts in the field to fortify our work. We had found the credibility and veracity in the Gottman Method, being validated by research, practice and theory. Within the local context, apart from anecdotal evidence, we have begun looking at empirically validating the research and practice within our practice with clients.

EMCC-TGI Secretariat

EMCC's journey with The Gottman Institute (TGI) began in 2013 where we got more acquainted with the Gottman Method. We studied the modality and its transferability to our context and practice in detail, hosted Gottman therapist and trainers for small, focused-group training, and discussions.

In early 2014, EMCC sent a management staff, as well as another therapist to Seattle, Washington to be trained to conduct the Seven Principles Programme (7PP) and Bringing Baby Home (BBH). On that trip the discussion of an alliance between The Gottman Institute and EMCC, and a collaboration to bring Gottman's research, practice and workshops (for both professionals and public) to Singapore was started. EMCC's commitment to ensure all of the work is accessible to all, regardless of language, culture or socio-economic backgrounds was also shared with TGI.

In September of 2015, EMCC and TGI inked a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), whereby EMCC became the exclusive Institutional Partner of The Gottman Institute based in Singapore. This provided the platform for the exchange and transfer of knowledge, information and resource support between both agencies.

In September 2016, EMCC, then, organised our first larger scale Gottman training workshop, with 93 participants gathering from around the region and beyond, to either attend Gottman Levels 1, 2 and the Seven Principles Leader Training.

EMCC's goal is to use our partnership with TGI to impact and improve marriages in Singapore and beyond. Key players impacting marriages would be therapists and educators, and a strong community that advocates good practice standards, learning and professional development; ultimately benefit clients. The formation of the Gottman Community@SG seeks to serve that end; and the involvement, participation and invaluable contributions of her participants would be pivotal for its success.

The EMCC-TGI Secretariat was established to support the Gottman Community@SG both professionally and administratively.

Gottman Community@SG

In 2015, a long-term partnership was established with The Gottman Institute (TGI) to fulfil our vision of being a Centre of Excellence in couples and relationship work in an Asian context. We are committed to marriage and family work through professional development of practitioners in these practices, by providing a platform for formal-, community-, and peer-learning.

EMCC believes the most effective and ethical way to provide support to marriages in need is to have well-trained practitioners, and having accessibility to them. We believe that we need to invest in training events to develop professionals and create a platform for the community to practice the process.

As a 'Gottman Community', a community of practice, we have an alliance of like-minded professionals with a platform for regular and direct contact with TGI faculties, EMCC's professionals (who are practitioners), and colleagues to exchange ideas, thoughts and practice wisdom.

Mission

The Gottman Community@SG is a community of counsellors, psychotherapists, psychologists, clinical social workers and educators using the Gottman Couple Therapy Method. Its mission is to help advocate, propagate and support the learning and practise of the Gottman Method of Couples therapy in the society we practise within.

Objectives

- To create a Gottman community of practitioners keen on learning and acquiring skills and competence in the Gottman method of therapy.
- To provide a pivotal support base – physical location for meet-ups to touch base, to allow face-to-face interactions and for possible tele-conferencing, as a satellite facility for TGI activities.

- To enlarge our network of partners and stakeholders through publicity and advocacy to ASEAN and China
- To participate in an Asian research study on the Gottman method, contributing to the global landscape in effective psychotherapy.

Membership

You are invited to enroll into the Gottman Community@SG as a Member, your membership is an expression of your interest to grow in your knowledge and practice of the Gottman Method Couples Therapy as well as a commitment to contribute to the community with your skills, knowledge and talents for the greater good of marriages in our society.

A. Eligibility

You are eligible to join the Gottman Community@SG if you are:

- I. A counsellor, psychotherapist, social worker, psychologist who has completed Level 1, Level 2, or Level 3;
- II. A counsellor, psychotherapist, social worker, psychologist who has completed Level 1,2, or 3 and a member of a professional body such as SASW, SAC or its equivalent (with a Board of Standards, Ethics, and Discipline);
OR
- III. A qualified 7 Principles Program Leader.

B. Benefits

As a member of the Gottman Community@SG, you can benefit in the following ways:

- I. Attendance at the Gottman Community Sessions for Professional Development and/or Supervision/Group Learning;
- II. Be eligible for Member Rates for Gottman training workshops;

- III. Be eligible for Member Rates when purchasing the Seven Principles Program resources.

C. Membership Fee

You have the option of paying:

- I. S\$50 for one year; or
- II. S\$75 for two years; or
- III. S\$100 for three years.

D. Membership Period

The Membership Period will start from the date of registration and upon full payment.

E. Gottman Community Sessions

We have scheduled Community Sessions to discuss issues that matter to our members. Members are welcome to attend any of the triannual Gottman Community Sessions. Attendance is not compulsory. A contribution is usually collected at each session to defray the cost related to refreshments. Members will be informed in advance of any additional costs, if any.

Members may bring along a maximum of two guests to each of the sessions. There will be an Admission Fee of S\$30 per Session for each guest. The Admission Fee is waived upon registration and admission to Membership. The eligibility criteria are listed above.

F. Liaison Service

Members can approach the EMCC-TGI Secretariat for their professional and administrative needs. The Secretariat will be glad to provide support and help in any way that assists members.

G. Meeting Space

Members can contact the Secretariat to make arrangements for the use of EMCC's premise for activities that are in line with the objectives of the Gottman Community@SG. Use of this space is subject to availability. Administration fees would be applicable (exact fees would be advised on request).

Relationship between EMCC-TGI Secretariat and the Gottman Community@SG

EMCC-TGI Secretariat has two concurrent roles to play with regard to the Gottman Community@SG: Administrative and Professional functions.

Administrative Role

EMCC-TGI Secretariat will be involved in:

- I. Planning for and organizing the Sessions, Courses or Workshops;
- II. Resourcing Educators with training materials;
- III. Providing Administrative support for Educators and Practitioners;
- IV. Initiating Publicity and Marketing efforts;
- V. Seeking Endorsements and Funding;
- VI. Providing thought-leadership in the areas of Relationships and Marriages.

At this moment, Members who are 7PP Educators can purchase the training materials from the EMCC-TGI Secretariat. Orders can be placed online by going to emcc.org.sg/gottman/resources.

An example of an administrative support for educator may be that the Secretariat can support Member educators with an online Event Management System where participants can register for the workshops Members are organizing. At the conclusion of the workshop, a specially designed Evaluation Form will be sent to participants. The information gathered from the Evaluation Forms will be passed on to the Member. This collaboration may be mutually beneficial should there be research study that we might be involved in, that requires information, and Members are contributing to that research which also validates their work.

EMCC-TGI Secretariat can help to produce publicity and marketing design/materials that Members can use to publicize either Gottman Training Workshops or local 7PP Workshops.

EMCC-TGI Secretariat will proactively seek opportunities to advocate and provide thought-leadership for corporate and governmental decisions and funding on areas of marriages, married life and inform policies and policymakers.

Professional Role

EMCC's team of professional psychotherapists will avail themselves to:

- I. Facilitate the Gottman Community Sessions by case discussions, role plays and video viewing;
- II. Assist other Member therapists to proceed on to the Certification track till their successful qualification as Certified Gottman Therapists by providing information wherever possible;
- III. Provide consultancy/peer support /supervision on the Gottman method to enable therapists to hone their skills.

EMCC's experienced Seven Principles Program Leaders will:

- I. Offer hands-on coaching experience to Member 7PP Leaders through education workshop opportunities to train with us in our public and chartered runs.

Relationship between Gottman Community@SG and Stakeholders

To serve Stakeholders

Gottman Community@SG must serve her greater community and external stakeholders by being a platform for collective voice to share expertise and in-depth knowledge on marriages and relationships to various stakeholders. Our identified list of stakeholder is, but not limited to, as follows:

- Corporations/Companies,
- Community,
- Religious Groups,
- Government and her Agencies, and
- and the General Public.

We will be keen to, along with our members, be involved in advocacy, policy work, and education work with the collective practice wisdom and knowledge cumulated as a community

Data Gathering

We believe in the Interrelation between theory, research and practice. Data Gathering contributing to research within a local context is on the forefront of our minds, and are deliberate in data gathering that provides the necessary information for research studies of the Gottman Method in the Local context. Educators, practitioners and members of this community have a part and responsibility to play as well. Members can help gather empirical date through specifically designed Feedback and/or Evaluation. The Secretariat will be in a good position to provide the expertise in the design and development of these forms.

Become a Member

To be eligible to be a member of the Gottman Community@SG, you must have at least completed the Gottman Level 1 Clinical Training or be a trained seven Principles Program Leader. You can find out when these trainings will be conducted in Singapore by going to emcc.org.sg/gottmansingapore

If you are already eligible, you can sign up to be a member of the Gottman Community@SG today by going to emcc.org.sg/gottman/registration.