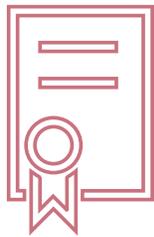


# RELATIONSHIP EDUCATION:

Investing in Your Family



**BY  
GRACE  
HAGGARD  
BARRUS**

**Family is a public health issue.** From physical safety and mental health to education and finances, healthy families and marriages create stability and opportunities in our personal lives and in our communities. So what are we doing to actively promote healthy relationships? Many couples and families aren't doing anything at all.

School of Family Life professor and Utah Marriage Commission cochair Dr. Alan Hawkins is working to change this by promoting relationship education for individuals of all ages and relationship stages so that everyone can have healthy, happy relationships and marriages. In fact, over the past seven years Hawkins has focused his efforts on passing a bill in the state of Utah, SB 54, that encourages premarital education for engaged couples. The bill was signed into law on March 21, 2018.

### **First Step: Education**

For those who grow up in an unstable family situation, knowing what a healthy relationship looks like can be difficult. When a couple is getting married and hoping to start a healthy family of their own, this issue becomes even more pressing.

This is the idea behind relationship education: teaching individuals of all ages and family backgrounds what healthy relationships look like and how to build and sustain them. "When you have something that's so important, we as a society need to educate people about those issues," says Hawkins.

### **A State Issue**

Hawkins worked with scholars, students, and legislators to pass a bill that promotes relationship education specifically for engaged couples. The bill will give couples a \$20 rebate on their marriage license fee if both individuals complete approved premarital education or counseling. If couples do not invest in premarital education, \$20 of their marriage license fee will go to the Utah Marriage Commission to support free relationship education services in each county.

For engaged couples, this bill provides a choice and an incentive to improve their relationship before marriage, allowing them to start their family with a better relationship and with higher satisfaction.

Hawkins believes that this simple step will lower the cost of family instability in Utah. Divorce costs Utah taxpayers an estimated \$275 million annually, but Hawkins estimates that SB 54 can save the state and its taxpayers more than \$2 million of that cost every year.

When asked why he kept fighting for a premarital education bill, Hawkins says that "we need to do more to help young people get to a good place where healthy marriage is a greater possibility." 