This description begins with the observation that while the availability of social support from one's partner reduces distress, the actual receipt of support is often unhelpful, and at times is associated with feelings of inadequacy, indebtedness, and inequity (unintended but potent negative side-effects of the support transaction). Yet dyadic relationships remain the primary source of support for most individuals. Can social support research offer any guidance for improving the skillfulness of this support? We started testing this hypothesis by conducting the Skillful Support Intervention (SSI) study with the aim to recruit eighty couples. The Skillful Support Intervention (SSI) involves a workshop that covers four main skill areas: sequence and stages of helping, support styles and needs (and the matching support to need), giving support in a streamlined, non-directive manner promoting mutuality of support.

Skillful support enhances dyadic coping, but well-meant support attempts are often miscarried, and lead to greater costs than benefits. We present the structure of the current research and identify means for promoting the benefits and ameliorating the costs of support. Effectiveness will be evaluated by comparing the intervention and control groups on change in support behavior, partner perception of support, mood and relationship feelings, and relationship status. We finish by discussing considerations for future research of adding measures to ways in which women respond to stress, and more accurate advice on how and when to provide specific types gender based support such as ways to deal with interpersonal life events.