

Growing Closer through Hard Times: Resilient Relationships

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Dr. John Gottman

- ✦ Began researching relationship in 1972
- ✦ At that time, 2000 studies, only six tried to predict the future of the relationship
- ✦ Questions Gottman explored (for 34 years):
 - ✦ What variables predict divorce?
 - ✦ Are healthy and distressed relationships different?
 - ✦ What predicts people's adaptation to major life transitions
 - ✦ What makes relationships work well?
 - ✦ What helps people have access to their sense of humor while fighting?

The LOVE LAB

Multi-dimensional

- ✦ Physiological Measures
- ✦ Videotaping conflict and non-conflict
- ✦ Self-report scales
- ✦ Enactment and observation
- ✦ Empirical research
 - ✦ Replication – 6-8 different studies
 - ✦ Findings correlate with other studies
 - ✦ Development of the evidence-based clinical model

What predicts Divorce or Breakup?

- ✦ Ratios
 - ✦ Couples who breakup, during disagreement, 1:1.25 positive to negative ratio
 - ✦ For stable relationships, during conflict, 5:1 P:N, during non-conflict, 20:1.
- ✦ The Four Horsemen
 - ✦ Criticism, Defensiveness, Contempt, Stonewalling
 - ✦ Anger is not predictive
 - ✦ All negativity not as corrosive. Reciprocal vs Escalating
- ✦ Repair
 - ✦ Sense of humor
 - ✦ Rich climate of appreciation predicts effective repair



To Create Lasting Relationships

- ✦ Based on past research, must change three things:
- ✦ Increase positivity overall (non-conflict context -- may be easiest to do)
- ✦ Decrease negativity during conflict
- ✦ Increase positivity during conflict (hardest to do due to habits of mind)

GOALS OF GOTTMAN THERAPY

- ✦ Become Better Friends
- ✦ Change the Way of Handling Conflict
 - ✦ Solvable, Perpetual and Gridlocked problems
 - ✦ Six Steps to solving problems (see next slide)
 - ✦ Diffuse Physiological Arousal
 - ✦ Gridlock to Dialogue – Dreams within conflict
- ✦ Make Repair More Effective
- ✦ Support and Share Life Dreams

Six Steps to Solving Problems

1. Softened Startup
2. Replace Four Horsemen with antidotes
3. Physiological Soothing (self and other)
4. Repair and De-escalation
5. Accepting Influence
6. Compromise

And Baby Makes Three

- ✦ What are the consequences of having a baby – both positive and challenging?
 - ✦ Sleep deprivation
 - ✦ Lack of time for self care
 - ✦ Financial and practical changes
 - ✦ Child focus to the family
- ✦ How do you keep the marriage on the priority list?
 - ✦ Small things often
 - ✦ Emotional bank account
 - ✦ Work on friendship all the time

Living with Grief

- ✦ This is not a single episode of loss or trauma – what happens when difficult events continue?
 - ✦ Pre-diagnostic phase (anticipatory grief)
 - ✦ Acute phase of diagnosis and crisis
 - ✦ Chronic Phase
- ✦ Stages of Grief: Denial, Anger, Bargaining, Depression, Acceptance (Kubler-Ross)
- ✦ Grief affects all levels – physical, emotional, cognitive, behavioral, and spiritual
- ✦ Rituals of connection and support

Adaptations

- ✦ Attachment Injuries
 - ✦ Loss of the dream
 - ✦ Handling sudden overwhelming events
 - ✦ It is not what happens to you but who you are with when it happens
- ✦ Traumatic stress that is ongoing
- ✦ Redefinitions
 - ✦ Redefining roles in marital relationship, family functioning, sibling relationships, community
 - ✦ Adjustments to family and friendship relationships

MINDFULNESS

- ✦ Mindfulness is paying attention on purpose in the present moment without judgment
- ✦ Living in the present allows us to begin afresh over and over, to see what is possible now instead of grieving what is lost or mourning what may not be
- ✦ Self compassion is key comes from accepting each moment just as it is (Definition of Suffering)
- ✦ Mindfulness tips and activities

Stress Reducing Conversation

- ✦ Find a partner to talk with (preferably spouse or SO)
- ✦ Each pick an external stress (not one that affects your partner)
- ✦ Speaker and Listener – see handout for rules on what each one does
- ✦ Speaker speaks for 5 minutes, listener validates and supports
- ✦ Switch roles and repeat

Repair Exercise

- ✦ Aftermath of a regrettable incident
- ✦ Find a partner (use spouse if present)
- ✦ Pick a particular incident to process – pick something that happened a while ago so it is not too raw
- ✦ Go through the steps of processing the incident using the form
- ✦ Debrief