

Building Healthy Relationships / Marriages in Alabama

Satellite Conference and Live Webcast
Monday, April 15, 2013
9:00 – 11:00 a.m. Central Time

Produced by the Alabama Department of Public Health
Video Communications and Distance Learning Division

Faculty

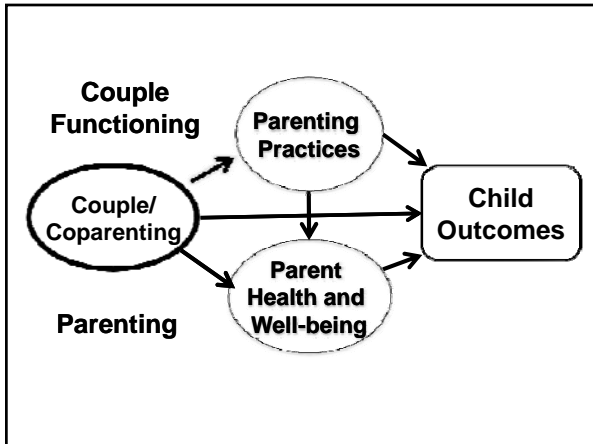
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- Our Goals**
- **Affirm the link between relational health and other dimensions of health**
 - **Promote your access to resources to share with clients**
 - **Promote your awareness of community classes that may be available for your clients**

- Our Goals**
- **Promote your skills for infusing information about healthy relationship skills into your work with clients**



Healthy Human Relationships are Key to Mental and Physical Health

- Those in healthy relationships:
 - Healthier eating habits
 - Healthier life styles
 - Have children with healthier eating habits and healthier life styles

Healthy Human Relationships are Key to Mental and Physical Health

- Healthier hearts, particularly women
- Lower stress levels
- Lower incidence of acute illness
 - Better immune systems
- Sleep better

Wood, et al., 2007; U.S. DHHS, 2008; Kiecolt-Glaser & Newton, 2001; Carr, et al., 2010; Ross, et al., 2009 DeVogel, et al., 2007; El Sheikh, et al., 2010; Amato & Cheadle, 2005

Healthy Human Relationships are Key to Mental and Physical Health

- Those in healthy relationships:
 - Have children with lower stress
 - Have children who sleep better
 - Have healthier children

Healthy Human Relationships are Key to Mental and Physical Health

- Lower incidence of chronic illness
- Lower levels of depression
- Miss work less often
- Greater longevity

Wood, et al., 2007; U.S. DHHS, 2008; Kiecolt-Glaser & Newton, 2001; Carr, et al., 2010; Ross, et al., 2009 DeVogel, et al., 2007; El Sheikh, et al., 2010; Amato & Cheadle, 2005

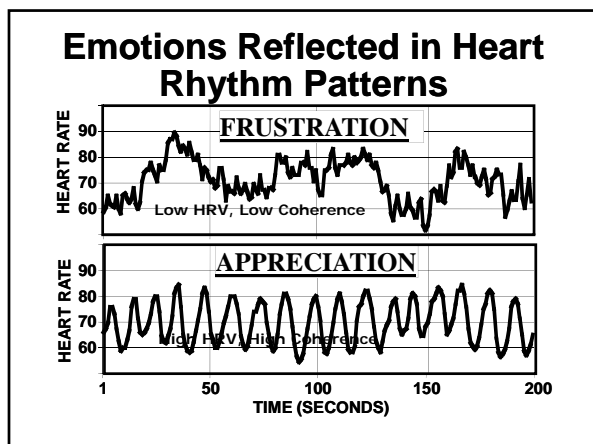
Emotions

- Emotions such as anger, frustration, or anxiety, lead to erratic and disordered heart rhythms, creating less synchronization

Emotions

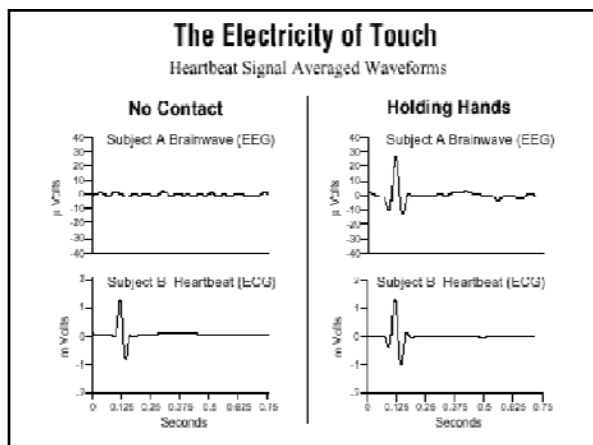
- Positive emotions, such as appreciation, or caring are associated with a highly ordered or *coherent* patterns in the heart rhythm, reflecting greater synchronization
- This creates a shift towards parasympathetic activity

(McCraty, Atkinson, & Tiller, 1995; McCraty, Atkinson, Tiller, Rein, & Watkins, 1995; Tiller, McCraty, & Atkinson, 1996)



Human Contact Changes the Heart

- Holding hands
- Alpha brain waves are affected by the heart



What is Relationship and Marriage Education (RME)?

- Teaching principles and skills that can strengthen couple and co-parenting relationships

The Alabama Healthy Marriage and Relationship Education Initiative

- Funded by U.S. DHHS since 2003
- Housed at Auburn University – HDFS/ACES
- Development and distribution of resources

The Alabama Healthy Marriage and Relationship Education Initiative

- Implementation of Relationships and Marriage EDUCATION programs for youth, low-resource parents, premarital couples and individuals, and married couples

The Alabama Healthy Marriage and Relationship Education Initiative

- Documentation of outreach and impact of the project

Resources for You and Your Clients

- Website: www.alabamamarriage.org
 - List of agencies and class offerings
 - Educational videos (5-7 minutes each)
 - One-page information briefs on different relationship topics
 - Information on recognizing domestic violence

Resources for You and Your Clients

- Alabama Marriage Handbook
- Coparenting Handbook
- Other relationship education brochures

USDHHS Resource Websites for You

- <http://www.healthymarriageinfo.org>
- www.healthymarriageandfamilies.org
 - New online training for state agencies on healthy relationships / marriages work

Family Resource Centers

- 10 currently contracted Family Resource Centers who offer RME programs
 - Weekly series of six and weekend retreats
- Network of educators participating in previous trainings

Across Alabama Over 27,000 Have Completed MRE Programs

- Family Resource Centers deliver in a variety of settings
 - Youth in high schools
 - Low-resource parents
 - Prison populations
 - Premarital individuals and couples
 - Married couples

**Across Alabama Over 27,000
Have Completed MRE Programs**

- Lee County classes by AHMREI faculty / students
 - Youth in high schools
 - Premarital individuals in AU classes
 - Couples (premarital, married, stepfamilies) in community

**Across Alabama Over 27,000
Have Completed MRE Programs**

- Head Start (FRC / AU joint implementation)
 - Low-resource parents

Youth Results

- Increases
 - Self-esteem
 - Conflict management skills
 - Interpersonal competence
 - Reflective coping

Youth Results

- Willingness to use relationship education
- Ability to resist pressure to have sex
- Individual empowerment

Youth Results

- Decreases
 - Endorsement of aggression use in relationships
 - Personal distress
 - Use of negative behaviors

Youth Results

- Faulty beliefs about relationships
- Reactive coping

Evaluation Results for Adults

- Individual strengths
 - Individual empowerment
 - Individual distress / depression

Evaluation Results for Adults

- Relational skills
 - Positive behaviors
 - Negative behaviors
 - Conflict management
 - Assertiveness
 - Disclosure / intimacy

Evaluation Results for Adults

- Couple / marital quality
 - Relationship quality
 - Relationship adjustment
 - Trust
 - Dedication
 - Perception of stability
 - Positive feelings about partner

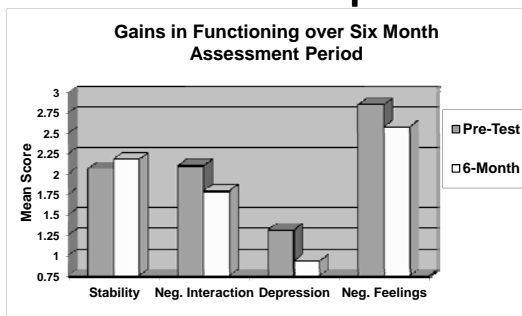
Evaluation Results for Adults

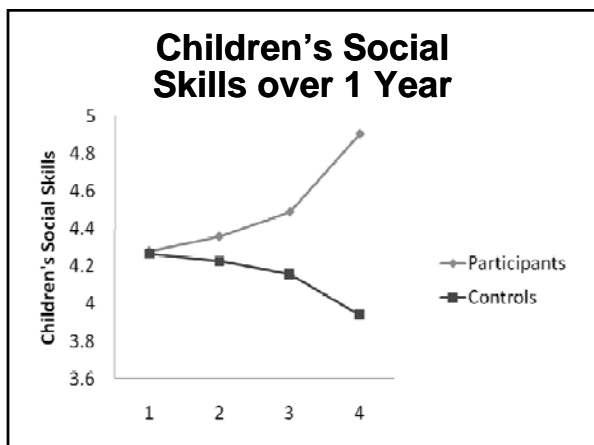
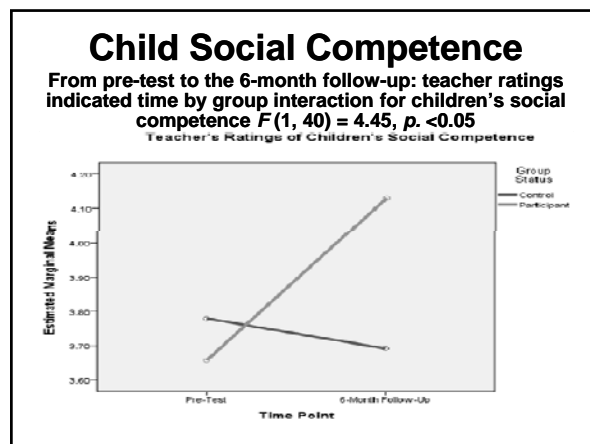
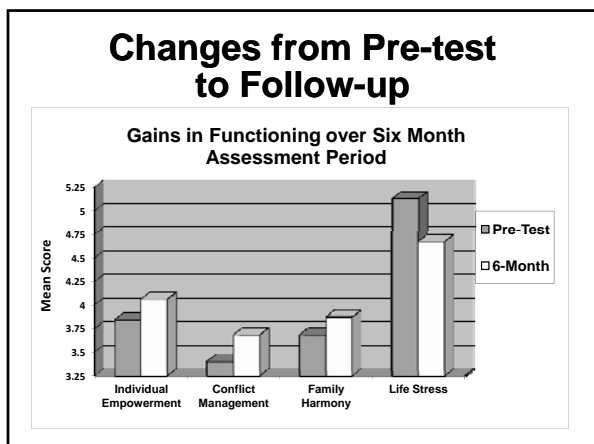
- Relationship satisfaction
- Happiness in relationship
- Family harmony
- Sexual satisfaction

Evaluation Results

- Parenting
 - Co-parenting quality
 - Positive parenting behaviors
 - Positive parenting
 - Parenting efficacy

Changes from Pre-test to Follow-up





Expectations and Clarifications

- How is relationship and marriage education different than couple's therapy or marriage counseling?
- Most of the individuals I work with are single parents – how is this going to be relevant to them?

Expectations and Clarifications

- Am I supposed to encourage couples to get married?
- Is this information culturally relevant?
- What am I expected to do with the information I have learned?

How Do You Define a "Healthy Relationship"?

- Commitment
- Satisfaction
- Communication
- Conflict management
- Lack of domestic violence
- Fidelity

How Do You Define a “Healthy Relationship”?

- Interaction and time together
- Intimacy and emotional support
- Commitment to children
- Trust

Components of Research-based RME: The National Extension Relationship and Marriage Education Model (NERMEM)

- Care for self
- Choose
- Know
- Care
- Share
- Manage
- Connect

Care for Self: It Starts with Health

- Healthy couple relationships impact health and health impacts relationships

Care for Self: It Starts with Health

“Wellness is not just the absence of illness or problems. It involves positive well-being by the practice of positive lifestyle behaviors and good health habits.”

– World Health Organization

Care for Self: It Starts with Health

- Emphasize the concept of “putting on your own mask first”

Keys to Physical and Sexual Health

- Physical health
 - Eating right
 - Regular sleep and wake times
 - Physical activity
 - Avoiding harmful substances

Keys to Physical and Sexual Health

- **Sexual health**
 - Healthy choices
 - Minimize risks

Three Keys to Social / Emotional Health

1. **Help people you serve notice and appreciate the small good things in their lives – past, present, and future**
 - As people appreciate the good in their lives, they often find greater happiness and satisfaction

Three Keys to Social / Emotional Health

2. **Help the people you serve identify and use their strengths**
 - Strengths are not always “talents”

Three Keys to Social / Emotional Health

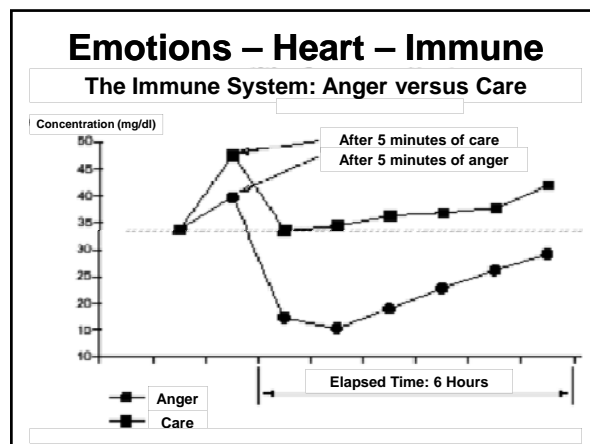
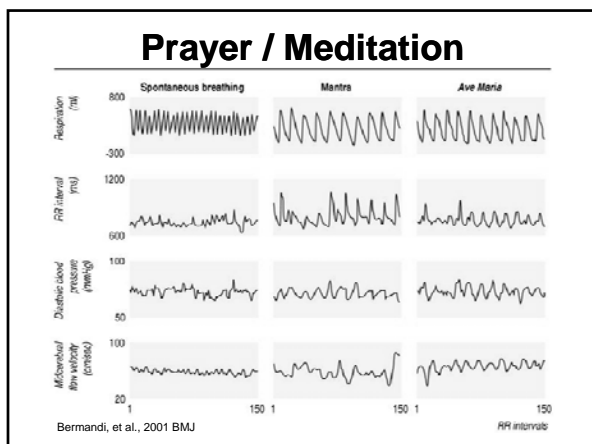
- Help individuals identify their strengths
- Call attention to strengths when you notice them

Three Keys to Social / Emotional Health

3. **Encourage the people you serve, serve others**
 - When we do things to make life better for others, our lives are better – it feels good to do good

Critical Skills for Self-care

- **Recognize unhealthy relationship dynamics**
- **Use stress management skills**



- ### Freeze Frame
1. Disengage from stress feelings and thoughts
 2. Shift attention to center of your chest / heart
 3. Make an effort to activate a positive feeling
 - Genuine feeling of appreciation, love, forgiveness

- ### Freeze Frame
4. What attitude / action will positively effect the relationship
 5. Quietly sense any change in thought or feeling

- ### Summary: Care for Self
- To maintain a healthy relationship, each partner must focus on their health by:
 - Eating healthy and exercising regularly
 - Setting regular sleep and wake times

- ### Summary: Care for Self
- Noticing and appreciating the good things in one's life
 - Finding ways to serve and use one's strengths
 - Looking for positive meaning in one's life
 - Managing stress in healthy ways

In many ways beginning a relationship is like launching a raft into a river... Natural currents will try to take you downstream. It does not matter how much you care about each other, no matter how full of hope and promise and good intentions, if you stay on the raft without a good deal of paddling – infrequent or sporadic paddling is not enough – you will end up somewhere down river. In human relations, “paddling” is analogous to the attention and energy devoted to our relationships.

– Adapted from: Doherty, W. (2001). *Take back your marriage*. New York: Guilford Press.

Choose: Making the Relationship a Priority

- The deliberate and conscious decisions that strengthen relationships
- The importance of intentionality in establishing and nourishing healthy relationships
- Necessary in ALL other NERMEM components of a healthy relationship

Putting the Relationship First

- Do not let other interests come between partners
- Work on building the relationship
- Focus on each other’s strengths
- Envision a healthy future together

*“In marriage, the grass grows greener . . .
 . . . on the side of the fence
 you water most.”*

– Dr. James P. Marshall,
 The Marriage Garden

Help Couples Cultivate Commitment

- What can you do to help couples you serve strengthen their commitment?
 - Talk about setting goals and come up with strategies to reach those goals
 - Discuss the importance of realistic expectations

Help Couples Cultivate Commitment

- Help them develop a new way of thinking about commitment
 - It is not just about individual pursuit of happiness
- When necessary, refer them to a relationship or marriage enrichment workshop or professional counselor or therapist

**Summary:
Choose**

- Each partner must make intentional relationship choices by:
 - Deciding, not sliding
 - Committing effort to the relationship
 - Focusing on each other's strengths

**Summary:
Choose**

- Avoiding hurtful thoughts or behaviors
- Finding ways to grow your relationship
- Envisioning a healthy future together

**Know: Getting to Know
Your Partner Well**

- Know involves developing an understanding of one's partner and being willing to share personal hopes and dreams with each other

**Know: Getting to Know
Your Partner Well**

- Sharing hopes and dreams helps to create and maintain stable, healthy relationships

**What Would You
Want to Know?**

- List 5 - 10 things you would want to know about a potential partner in the beginning stages of a dating relationship
- Why would you want to KNOW those things?

**Being in the Know:
10 Ps to Ponder**

1. Personality
2. Passions
3. Plans and priorities
4. Previous partners
5. Perspective taking

Being in the Know: 10 Ps to Ponder

- 6. Problem solving
- 7. Past family experiences
- 8. Physical / psychological health
- 9. Parenting experience / approach
- 10. Provider potential

Love Maps

- The information you store about your partner's dreams, joys, fears, likes, and dislikes, etc.
- Happy couples know about each other's worlds and they regularly seek updates about each other

Love Maps

- Why are love maps important?
- How can you help couples develop a love map?

"To look backward for a while is to refresh the eye, to restore it, and to render it more fit for its prime function of looking forward."

– Margaret Barber

The Story of Us

- When / how did you meet?
- When did you know this relationship was different?
- When did you decide you were committed?
- What were some of the good times?
- What were some of the hard times?

Summary: Know

- Getting to know one's partner well involves:
 - Asking about partner's life, thoughts, and feelings
 - Being sensitive to partner's worries and needs

Summary: Know

- Recalling positive experiences together
- Expressing sincere interest
- Revealing your thoughts and feelings
- Discussing what you expect in the relationship

Care: Showing Affecting and Respect

- Creating and maintaining stable, healthy couple relationships involves kindness, understanding, respect, and support, even when one's partner does not do the same

Building Positivity 5:1

- Five positives for each one negative is best for sustaining a healthy couple relationship

Building Positivity 5:1

- This concept applies across relationships – parents and children, grandparents and grandchildren, colleagues, and so on

Recognizing the Positive

- What does “positive” look like?
 - Give verbal compliments
 - Offer encouragement
 - Catch partner doing things right
 - Use positive non-verbal
 - Speak about positives

Increasing the Joy in Relationships

- What are some behaviors that might help increase the joy and closeness in relationships?
- Following are examples of caring actions:
 - Show interest
 - Be affectionate

Increasing the Joy in Relationships

- Show you care
- Be appreciative
- Show your concern
- Be empathic
- Be accepting

Increasing the Joy in Relationships

- Joke around
- Share your joy
- Nice surprises

Customizing the Care with Love Messages

- Gary Chapman lists five languages of love:
 - Words of affirmation
 - Quality time
 - Receiving gifts
 - Acts of service
 - Physical touch

What Is Your Love Language?

- a. I feel most loved when my partner uses kind words and compliments to tell me how much I am valued and appreciated
- b. I feel most loved when my partner gives me full attention and I am able to spend alone time with my partner

What Is Your Love Language?

- c. I feel most loved when my partner gives me gifts
- d. I feel most loved when my partner does things for me, such as cooking dinner, doing laundry, cleaning, and taking care of the car

What Is Your Love Language?

- e. I feel most loved when my partner shows his / her feelings through physical contact, such as holding hands, kissing, hugging, or sex

Unconditional Affection and Appreciation

- Interactions in all relationships involve some costs
- In committed relationships, sacrifices can seem like an investment rather than a cost or loss

Unconditional Affection and Appreciation

- To maintain a positive balance in the relationship bank account, couples must make regular deposits – and compromise from time to time

Unconditional Affection and Appreciation

- Expressing appreciation is a great way to make a deposit

Heart Lock-In

- Shift attention to area of your heart
- Breathe slow and deep
 - Air passing over heart
- Activate appreciation / care for partner / spouse
- Sustain appreciation, love, forgiveness

Heart Lock-In

- Focus breathing / heart when mind wanders
 - Reconnect feelings of appreciation, care, or love

Key Times of the Day

- How we greet each other and a new day
- How we send each other off for the day
- How we welcome each other home
- Quality time together
- How we say good night

Summary: Care

- Some ways individuals show affection and respect to a partner include:
 - Being open and listening to one’s partner
 - Focusing on the good in one’s partner

Summary: Care

- Accepting and valuing differences
- Giving love in the way the partner likes to be loved
- Showing appreciation

Share: Developing and Maintaining Friendship

- While Care focuses on “doing” for one’s partner, Share focuses on what couples do together

Share: Developing and Maintaining Friendship

- Share is about what a couple learns together, who they become together, and how they grow in love together

Share: Building the Friendship

- How do friendships begin?
- How do we build friendships?
 - What kind of questions are asked?
- How is friendship different from romance?

Reliance

- People mutually meet other needs
- Dependability is needed
 - Consistent experiences of reliability

Healthy Relationships Plan

- Know
- Trust
- Rely
- Commit
- Touch

Sharing – Three Critical Elements of Building Friendship

- Spend meaningful time together
- Build couple identity
- Nurture positive interactions

Spend Meaningful Time Together

- What are some things that distract from couple time?
 - Demands of work
 - Children
 - Over-scheduling / conflicting schedules
 - Personal hobbies

Spend Meaningful Time Together

- Television
- Mobile devices
- Internet
- How can you help your clients create time together?

Sharing – Three Critical Elements of Building Friendship

- Spend meaningful time together
- Build couple identity
- Nurture positive interactions

Build Couple Identity

- What are some ways partners can show loyalty?
 - Work together to identify and reach common goals
 - Create rituals of connection
 - Engage together in common purposes to build unity

Build Couple Identity

- Taking time to focus on each other is particularly difficult for new parents and couples who recently brought in a foster or adoptive child

Sharing – Three Critical Elements of Building Friendship

- Spend meaningful time together
- Build couple identity
- Nurture positive interactions

Summary: Share

- Strong couples develop and maintain friendship over time by:
 - Scheduling meaningful time together
 - Finding common interests and activities
 - Creating couple traditions and rituals

Summary: Share

- Working towards common goals
- Nurturing positive interactions
- Turning toward partner's bids for connection
- Envisioning themselves as a "team"

Manage: Handling Stress and Differences

- Manage focuses on a couple's use of strategies to stay calm, contain their stress response, soothe their partner, listen attentively, make an effort to understand their partner's point of view, accept differences, and forgive one another

Manage: Handling Stress and Differences

- Many problems in long-term, healthy couple relationships are never resolved
 - Instead, couples work to manage them

What Are the Top Six Things Couples Argue About?

1. Money
2. Sex
3. Work
4. Children
5. Housework
6. In-laws

How We Respond to Threats

- A real or perceived threat initiates a reaction in our bodies that limits our capacity to listen, talk, and handle conflict in a healthy way

How We Respond to Threats

- Common reactions:
 - Fight
 - Flight
 - Freeze (or shut down)

Halting the Process

- Where, along this line, is it best to halt “normal” conflict before it escalates to a crisis?



Use Positive Assumptions

- Scenario:
 - You come home and find the TV blaring and the baby crying – and your partner is sitting on the couch with his / her feet up, half asleep

Managing Relationship Problems

- What is the goal of communication?
 - GOAL = UNDERSTANDING

Managing Relationship Problems

- Even the happiest couples have some problems
- “Relationships will work to the extent that you have wound up with a set of perpetual problems you can learn to live with.”*
- John Gottman

Managing Relationship Problems

- Strategies for managing conflict:
 - Soften your startup
 - Learn to make and receive repair attempts
 - Soothe yourself and each other

Managing Relationship Problems

- Search for common ground
- Show acceptance and understanding

Soften Startups

- How issues are brought up is key
 - Discussions often end on the same note they begin
- Bring up problems gently and without blaming

Soften Startups

- How can these harsh startups be “softened”?
 - “I need your help getting the kids to the babysitter so I can get to work on time! I can’t afford to be late again. I need this job and we need the money.”

Soften Startups

- “Why can’t you ever remember anything? I told you 50 times you needed to pick up some more diapers!”

My Soft Approach

- Describe my feelings; use “I” instead of starting with “You....”
- Focus on the specific – and current behavior
- Don’t always have to “win”
 - Apologize

My Soft Approach

- Use kind words and a kind tone of voice
- Express some appreciation, before offering a complaint
- Don’t “gunny-sack”
 - Keep things inside and then dump everything out at once

The “WIN” Formula

- Start gently by remembering the good
 - When
 - I feel
 - Need

Speaker – Listener Technique

Speaker	Listener
Stay on topic	Don’t interrupt
Speak for yourself	Don’t think of an answer
Don’t go on and on	Seek to understand
Pause	Paraphrase
Let listener paraphrase	Ask questions
Use positive non-verbals	Use positive non-verbals

Goal = to be understood

Use Requests, Not Criticisms

- Criticisms are more global than requests, adding negative words or blame to attack a partner’s character or personality
- The intent of a criticism is to make one’s self right and the partner wrong

Use Requests, Not Criticisms

- Criticisms include generalizations like:
 - “You always...”
 - “You never...”
 - “Why can’t you ever...”
- Requests address specific situations

Limit Defensiveness

- Seeing one's self as the victim, warding off a perceived attack, a way of saying, "The problem isn't me, it's you!"
- Cross-complaining
 - Meeting partner's complaint or criticism with a complaint of your own, ignoring what partner said

Limit Defensiveness

- Disagreeing and then cross-complaining
 - "That's not true, you're the one who..."
- Yes-butting
 - Begin by agreeing but end up disagreeing

Limit Defensiveness

- Repeating one's self without paying attention to what the other person is saying

Avoid Contempt

- Contempt is attacking a partner's sense of self and putting them down
 - Name calling
 - Wimp, fat, stupid, ugly, slob, lazy, or crazy

Avoid Contempt

- Insults like "How can you be so..."
- Body language and tone of voice say a lot
 - Sneering, rolling one's eyes, curling upper lip
- Hostile humor, sarcasm, or mockery

Avoid Contempt

- Contempt is considered the most poisonous because it conveys disgust
 - Contempt leads to more conflict rather than reconciliation

Avoid Stonewalling

- When withdrawing to avoid conflict, a person might think s/he is being “neutral,” but stonewalling conveys disapproval, icy distance, separation, disconnection, and / or smugness
 - 85% of the time it is males who use this strategy

Avoid Stonewalling

- Stony silence
- Mumbling or muttering
- Changing the subject
- Removing one’s self physically

Apply the “Brakes” with Repair Attempts

- Key: Taking responsibility for part of the problem
- Common ground
 - “We can tackle this together.”
- I need to calm down
 - “Can I take that back?”

Apply the “Brakes” with Repair Attempts

- Sorry
 - “Let me try again,” “I didn’t think of that,” “Forgive me”
- Get to yes
 - “I see what you mean,” “Let’s compromise”

Apply the “Brakes” with Repair Attempts

- Stop Action!
 - “We are off track,” “Let’s take a break”
- I appreciate
 - “I see your point,” “We are both saying...,” “I know this isn’t your fault”

Apply the “Brakes” with Repair Attempts

- Use positive assumptions

Soothe Yourself and Each Other

- **When things get too heated, couples should spend about 20 minutes apart**
 - **without thinking about the problems**
 - **Agree on a time to come back**

Soothe Yourself and Each Other

- **Avoid negative thoughts and blame**
 - **“I don’t have to take this anymore”**
 - **“Why is he / she always doing this?”**

Soothe Yourself and Each Other

- **Use relaxation / soothing strategies as a distraction**
 - **Heart Lock / Freeze Frame, listen to music, exercise, watch TV, phone a friend**

Soothe Yourself and Each Other

- **Soothing requires learning what triggers flooding in one’s partner and avoiding those things**
- **Before approaching partner**
 - **Rehearse**
 - **“Skills + Positive Memories”**

Problem Solve Freeze Frame

1. **Disengage from stress feelings and thoughts**
2. **Shift attention to the center of your chest / heart**

Problem Solve Freeze Frame

3. **Make a sincere effort to activate a positive feeling**
 - **Genuine feeling of appreciation, love, forgiveness**
4. **What attitude / action will positively effect the relationship**

Problem Solve Freeze Frame

5. Quietly sense any change in thought or feeling and sustain it as long as you can

Finding Common Ground

- Take seriously a partner's preferences and opinions
- Search for common ground – ask questions like:
 - What do we agree about?

Finding Common Ground

- What are the most important feelings here?
- How can we understand this situation or issue?
- How should our goals be accomplished?
- What common goals do we have?

Accept, Forgive, Understand*

- Accept differences and respect partner's position
- Be willing to forgive and move on

Accept, Forgive, Understand*

- Think about the situation from each other's viewpoint
 - One partner's perception may differ greatly from the other's intent

Accept, Forgive, Understand*

- Can you think of people you have worked with who have been good examples of showing acceptance, forgiveness, and understanding?
- * Does not apply to abuse and violence

Summary: Manage

- **Conflict in relationships is inevitable, and healthy couples deal with differences in healthy ways:**
 - Understanding there cannot always be agreement
 - Sharing concerns in a calm, respectful tone

Summary: Manage

- Avoiding criticism and defensiveness
- Stopping conflict before it escalates
- Taking “time outs” but coming back to talk

Summary: Manage

- Soothing and supporting each other
- Being open to forgiveness
- Maintaining emotional and physical safety

Connect: Engaging a Positive Social Network

- **Couples live within the context of a larger community of meaningful relationships**

Connect: Engaging a Positive Social Network

- **It is within this context that couples learn what they value, how to pursue meaning for themselves as a couple, and offer service to others**
- **Strong relationships with others can act as a “safety net” that provides security for couples**

Three Elements of Connect

- **Engaging and drawing upon social connections with one’s family, peers, and community**
- **Attending to sources of meaning and purpose**

Three Elements of Connect

- Extending as partners to develop quality relationships with others in the community and offer service support

Connect in Your Community

- Engage in community organizations and service

Connect in Your Community

- Dedicating part of our lives to improving the world around us not only makes others happy, but it brings joy to our own

Connect in Your Community

- What opportunities exist in your community to engage those you work with in service?

Connecting to Sources of Meaning

- Belief systems provide a sense of purpose and support
- Faith-based organizations can provide social and financial support for families

Connecting to Sources of Meaning

- Belief systems add comfort in times of trouble

Summary: Connect

- **Couples strengthen their relationships by engaging positive social networks in various ways:**
 - **Growing and maintaining extended family relationships**
 - **Being part of a supportive network of friends**

Summary: Connect

- **Engaging jointly in community organizations and service**
- **Seeking out resources to strengthen the relationship**

Final Thoughts

- **This training can help you strengthen adult relationships**
- **Strong couple and / or coparenting relationships create a healthy family climate**

Final Thoughts

- **Ultimately, strong families promote the health and well-being of children, adults, and communities**
- **Even a small effort can make a big difference**

The world is moved along, not only by the mighty shoves of its heroes, but also by the aggregate of the tiny pushes of each honest worker.

– Helen Keller