

Commitment and Communication in Healthy Relationships

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Relationship “Skills”?

- Skills: abilities that we learn
- Healthy relationship skills are not in-born

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Keep in Mind

- Skills are not the whole picture
- Personality or personal style
- Life philosophy or values
- Motivation

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Relationship Work Ethic

- Build an understanding that relationship work is like other work
- It requires resolve, understanding, acceptance, and a willingness to be creative at times

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Abuse is Not O.K.!

- We want to educate people to improve their couple relationships
- We do not want to advocate remaining in unhealthy relationships
 - Physical harm
 - Emotional violence

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Commitment Forms a Foundation For a Healthy Relationship

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Why is Commitment Important?

- Predicts marital quality
- Encourages investment in relationship

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Understanding Commitment

- We pledge, promise, or obligate ourselves to something or someone.
- Commitment to a person vs. commitment to self.

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The Challenges of Commitment

- Commitment precedes benefits

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Three Dimensions of Commitment

- Different combination of the three dimensions for each relationship.

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Commitment as Attraction

- Rewards and satisfactions
- Love and closeness

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Commitment as a Moral Obligation

- A vow, obligation or duty
- Religious or family values

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Commitment as Constraint

- Can't leave because of children
- Can't leave because of social consequences
- Can't leave because of finances
- Other reasons

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Many Different Ways of Being Committed

- Attraction or rewards
- Moral obligation
- Constraint
- Combination

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How Can we Encourage Commitment?

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Make the Relationship Primary.

- Invest time and energy
- Be proactive

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Make Couple Time a Priority.

- Common, shared, regular activities
- Many different ways

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Set Limits on Intrusions.

- Many different issues
- Work together to set boundaries
- Sensitivity to partner's needs and preferences

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Build Rituals of Connection.

- Take classes
- Share discoveries
- Hugging
- Exercising

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Repairing Commitment

- Attraction: think about best times
- Obligation: promises and commitments
- Constraint: effects and consequences
- Some relationships need to end.

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Hard Decisions

- Destroying either person?
- Get counsel to balance sacrifice with self-respect
- Consider your values

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Reasonable Expectations

- Mentally remove self from market
- Avoid unfair comparisons
- See the best in partner and relationship

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A Metaphor for Commitment

- Winter in Minnesota
- Survive Winter
- Celebrate Spring

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The Weather Usually Gets Better.

- “Two out of three unhappily married adults who avoided divorce or separation ended up happily married five years later.”
- Make decisions when feeling safe and peaceful

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Commitment is a choice.

- Chance or choice?
- Keep a list of great moments
- Stay aware of strengths
- See problems as temporary

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Building Commitment

- It takes some work
- Requires dedication
- We can choose to resist alternatives
- We can choose to give priority
- We can choose a positive vision
- We can choose to see the gain

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Commitment Options

- Working hard AND
- Working smart
- Five positives for each negative

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Building Commitment With Positives

- Show interest.
- Be affectionate.
- Show you care.
- Be appreciative.
- Show your concern.
- Be empathic.
- Be accepting.
- Joke around.
- Share your joy.

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Using Commitment in Your Couples Education

- Use in your relationships
- Selecting programs
- Designing programs
- Teach commitment
- Use in relationship repair

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Conclusion: Blessed by Commitment

- Causes growth
- Brings joy
- Foundation for relationships

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**Once we have commitment,
then what?**

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Couples Communication 101

What is communication?

- Meaningful connection
- Not necessarily purposeful
- Accomplished via shared symbols
- Much is nonverbal

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Communication: Reality

- Critical part of intimate relationships
- Intimacy involves interactions

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Communication: Myth

- Not a magic potion
- One tool in the couple toolbox

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Emotional Communication

- The circulatory system of couple relationships
- How people pay attention to each other

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Basic Cycle of Intimacy

- Connection begins with a bid and a response
- Often the bid is tentative
- A loving response completes the basic cycle

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Everyday Interactions

- Common interactions are the backbone
- Basic units: bid and response
- *The Relationship Cure*, Gottman and De Claire

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Bid and Response Dance

- Bid: let's connect
- Response: yea or nay
- Both are often disguised

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Many Options for Bidding

- Communication is rich
- Bids may be verbal or not
- Bids have many shapes and forms

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Successful Communication

- Keep it clear
- Keep it soft
- Keep it positive
- Keep it open
- Learn to handle conflicts in healthy ways

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Keep it Clear

- Clarity of bid is important
- Reasons for unclear bids
- Clear bids are linked to success

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Keep it Soft

- "Soft startup" is a valuable skill
- Humor goes a long way
- Even high conflict couples can benefit

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Response Direction

- Turning toward response
- Turning against response
- Turning away response

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Relationship Environment

- Intimacy thrives in safe environments
- Aim for attentive, optimistic, and uncritical responses

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Keep it Positive

- A pattern of positive responses bodes well
- Positive does not always mean saying “yes”
- Respect need for connection

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The More, The Merrier

- More positive bids ...
- Positive responses generate more positive bids
- More attentiveness

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Keep it Open

- Create an expectation
- Share the good and the bad
- Honesty facilitates deep knowing

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Power-Sharing

- Being open means sharing power
- Communication is often a stage for power struggles
- Let your partner influence you

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Aggressive Honesty

- “Honesty” should not be a weapon
- Honest and loving communication is the goal

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Conflicts

- Spats under the microscope
- Healthy relationships include disagreements
- How we fight is important

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Conflicts, Part II

- Everyday interactions may be more important
- Use same basic skills
- Conflicts as opportunities

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Cautionary Notes for Conflicts

- Conflicts are normal
- Some patterns are unhealthy
- Making referrals

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Escalation

- Spiraling intensity and defensiveness
- De-escalation skills are critical
 - Soften tone
 - Empathize
 - Cool-off period

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Avoidance/Withdrawal

- One is unwilling to engage
- “Stonewalling” can cause chronic disconnection
- Meet in the middle

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Negative Interpretation

- Assumption of guilt
- Often leads to negative bids and responses
- Teach the glass half full

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Put-Downs

- Words can hurt us
- Contemptuousness and insults leave lasting injuries
- Think before speaking

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Teaching Couples Communication

- Plant seeds and encourage growth
- Highlight the basics
- Point to other resources

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Basics of Communication

- Emotional connection occurs during the bid-response dance
- How we communicate matters
- Communication "skills" can be developed

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Full Circle: Relationship "Skills"

- Skills are abilities that we learn and practice and improve
- Healthy relationship skills include building commitment and communicating
- Such skills are investments in quality

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