

## Marriage: The Foundation

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## Homework Processing

- Empathy
- Love Maps
- Appreciations
- What was this experience like for you?
- What did you learn about...
  - yourself?
  - your partner?
  - your relationship?
- What change will you make as a result of what you learned?

## Neurobiology

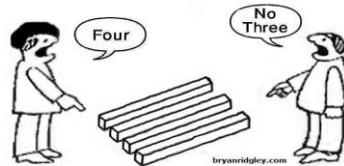
- We are built for connection
- Mirror neurons and empathy
- We are hurt in connection, and we heal in connection! – Brené Brown



## Conflict

- natural part of all relationships
- can deepen connection and intimacy
- Different is not wrong; it's just different

Reality can be so complex that equally valid observations from differing perspectives can appear to be contradictory.



## Gottman's Love Lab

- Empirically based approach
- Analyzed video of couples' interactions
- Predict divorce with 91% accuracy by observing 5 min interaction



**"Happy marriages are based on a deep friendship."**  
- Gottman & Silver



## Predicting Divorce

- Low ratio of positivity to negativity (If stable, should be 5:1)
- Harsh set-up of conflict discussions
- Presence of the Four Horsemen
- Gridlock on perpetual issues
- Failure of repair attempts
- Failure to accept influence from partner
- Little positive affect (affection, humor, interest)
- Pervasive emotional disengagement

## 4 Horsemen of the Apocalypse & Antidotes



## Criticism : Gentle Start-Up

- Def: negativity about partner's personality or character
- Antidote: Gentle Start-Up (ICE)
  - Identify a complaint (address specific behavior)
  - Communicate your feelings using I statements
  - Express as a positive need
- Example: "You always talk about yourself. You are so selfish."
 

v.

"You've shared a lot, and I'm feeling left out in our talk tonight.  
Would you please ask me about my day?"



## Gottman-Rapoport Conflict Blueprint



### Listening and Validation

- Speaker
  - No blaming or "you" statements; Use "I" statements about specific situation
  - Talk about your feelings
  - **State positive need – with every complaint, there is a longing and a recipe**
- Listener
  - Postpone your own agenda. Hear and repeat the content of the speaker's needs and perspective.
  - Hear the speaker's feelings (name emotions).
  - Validate the speaker by completing the sentence, "It makes sense to me that you would feel that way and have these needs, because...."
  - Ok to ask questions

## Defensiveness : Take Responsibility

- Def: self-protection in the form of righteous indignation or innocent victim-hood; wards off a perceived attack
- Antidote: Take responsibility for even a part of the problem
- Example: "It's not my fault that we're always late! You're the one who doesn't know how to drive faster than a snail's pace."
 

v.

"Well, part of this is my problem. I need to be more conscious of time as I'm getting ready."

## Contempt : Culture of Appreciation

- Def: statements that come from a relative position of superiority
  - goal is to demean partner
  - fueled by long-simmering negative thoughts about partner
  - greatest predictor of divorce
- Antidote: Build a culture of appreciation and respect
- Example:
 

"You're an idiot."  
name-calling, sarcasm, eye-rolling, sneering, mockery, hostile humor

v.

"I'm proud of the way you handled that teacher conference."

### Stonewalling : Self-Soothing

- Def: emotional withdrawal from interaction; disengagement; not giving usual nonverbal signals that listener is tracking the speaker
- Antidote: partner self-soothes in order to stay emotionally connected to partner
- Example: looks away, avoids eye contact, blank expression, says nothing

### Neurobiology

**Downstairs brain**  
Brain stem and limbic region  
(top of neck to bridge of nose)

- Primitive
- Basic functions (breathing and blinking)
- Innate reactions and impulses (fight, flight, freeze)
- Strong emotions (anger, fear) -- amygdala



**Upstairs brain**  
Cerebral cortex  
(directly behind forehead)

- Sophisticated
- Sound decision making and planning (think before acting)
- Self-understanding (regulate own emotions)
- Morality and empathy (consider how others feel)

### Flooding




**Diffuse Physiological Arousal**

- Heart rate over 100 bpm
- Holding breath or shallow breathing
- Cortisol released

**Limbic system hijacks frontal cortex**

**Attentional system – hyper-focused on identifying danger**

- Limited ability to process other information

**Facial and body tension**

} Fight/Flight/Freeze

**Creative problem solving CANNOT occur in this state!**

### “Flipping One’s Lid”




Prefrontal cortex  
P.F.C.  
“THE WISE LEADER”

“Flipped Your Lid”

The big emotions, anger, fear, anxiety etc...  
The AMYGDALA - The alarm center  
Acts on instinct:  
fight, flight or freeze

Credit: David Shapiro, M.D., in his book of the “wonder” and the science of “flipping lid” (Copyright © 2011, www.davidshapiro.com)

### Notice Warning Signs

- We all lose our cool sometimes.
- Self-regulation when your amygdala takes over
  1. Recognize the signs that you are about to “flip your lid”
    - Physical
    - Emotional
    - Behavioral
    - Cognitive
  2. Do no harm
    - Don’t speak
    - Hands behind your back
  3. Remove yourself from situation to calm down
    - Put yourself in time out
    - Breathe
    - Move it
  4. Repair and reconnect



Flipping Your Lid!



### Take a Time Out

- Explore conflict history to build empathy
- Discuss flooding to help recognize cues of self and partner DPA
  - What makes me/you feel flooded?
  - What are typical feelings and thoughts associated with being flooded?
  - Is there anything I can do to soothe you/myself?
- Create a Withdrawal Ritual
  - Establish a signal
  - Agree to break (most challenging for pursuer)
    - Must be at least 20 min long to dissipate DPA
    - Cannot involve rehearsing distress-maintaining thoughts
  - Agree to re-engage at a later time (most challenging for distancer)



## .....Calm Down.....



- Steps to self-soothing
  - Get moving to release tension
  - Deep breathing -- box breathing (4x4x4x4)
  - Progressive muscle relaxation
    - Notice areas of tension in body, contract and release these muscles
    - Let the region become heavy
    - Imagine the region becoming warm
  - Imagine calming place
    - Engage all senses

## Homework

- The Four Horsemen Assessment
- Flooding Assessment
- Discuss results together
- Notice the Horsemen this week
- Focus on the one Horseman you use the most and actively try to change it this week

## References and Resources

- John Gottman:** The Four Horseman of the Apocalypse
- *The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work: A Practical Guide from the Country's Foremost Relationship Expert*
- Sue Johnson:** Emotion-Focused Therapy and Demon Dialogues
- *Hold Me Tight: Seven Conversations for a Lifetime of Love*
- Dan Siegel:** Neuroscience
- *Mindsight: The New Science of Personal Transformation*
  - *The Developing Mind: How Relationships and the Brain Interact to Shape Who We Are*

## References and Resources

**Brené Brown:** Empathy and Vulnerability

**Audio CD**

- *The Gifts of Imperfect Parenting: Raising Children with Courage, Compassion, and Connection*

**Books**

- *I Thought It Was Just Me (But It Isn't): Making the Journey from "What Will People Think?" to "I Am Enough"*
- *Daring Greatly: How the Courage to be Vulnerable Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent, and Lead*
- *The Gifts of Imperfection: Let Go of Who You Think You're Supposed to be and Embrace Who You Are*
- *Rising Strong: The Reckoning, The Rumble, The Revolution*

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