

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

June 22, 2020

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**Creating Magic Through the Storms**  
*Sunbeam Family Services Shares Helpful Tools to Encourage Healthy Relationships*

**(OKLAHOMA CITY)** – Anxiety, worry and stress are a part of most people’s everyday lives. However, these feelings have a negative effect on relationships with others. The COVID-19 pandemic has potentially increased these feelings due to the fear of illness or uncertainty about social and economic effects of the outbreak. Shayla Winrow, LPC candidate at Sunbeam Family Services, shares encouragement and advice for managing healthy relationships in times of crises.

Life has looked more than a bit different for most the past two months. A global pandemic has had a wide-spread impact on not only our regular schedules and our social lives, but also on our relationships. We’ve had to adjust to an unprecedented time and continue to adjust in an ever-changing climate.

Many people are practicing physical distancing with others. After months of this practice, stressors in your relationships with family and with your partner might surface.

Stressors like the dirty laundry left, dishes in the sink, or overspending are difficult to navigate through normally. Add in a pandemic and these stressors quickly become Mt. Everest. So, how do we navigate the molehills in our lives that become mountains when our partner is there 24/7?

In the 1970’s, John Gottman and Robert Levenson began studies that would last for years. In the studies, they sat with couples to figure out how they dealt with conflict. Gottman and Levenson explored the differences between happy couples and unhappy couples. They found one consistency in all the happy couples: there were more positive interactions than negative interactions. Gottman and Levenson found that there was a “magic ratio” to communicating with a partner: five or more positive interactions to one negative interaction.

**Creating the Magic Ratio**

How do we help create this “magic ratio” in a time where the amount of normal interactions with our partners has increased?

Negative interactions include criticizing our partners, having contempt, becoming defensive and withdrawing. Body language communicates a great deal to our partners: Eye-rolling can feel dismissive and turning away from a partner has the power to make them feel like we don’t care about their emotions.

Don’t be too alarmed if these negative interactions are occurring in your relationship, especially in these times. Frequent positive interactions ensure easier navigation through the negative interactions.

**Empathy and Understanding**

Although we are all experiencing these unprecedented times, one partner might have a different emotional experience than another. The constant time together could cause assumptions a partner’s emotions. Taking time out to speak to your partner about their experience for 20 minutes daily or weekly not only demonstrates that you are interested in your partner, but it also creates a positive interaction that could make your partner feel heard and understood.

**Create a Safe Space**

You chose the person to weather the storms of life with for a reason, but hat reason may be clouded by your tendencies to criticize your partner. These times can be confusing, anxiety-provoking, and frustrating. Creating a safe space where we can communicate without fear of judgment or critical words allows negative interactions to be navigated in a healthy manner. Creating a safe space includes listening well, using a soft and gentle tone and looking for opportunities to agree with your partner. This space also includes setting boundaries, such as when to communicate about negative interactions, where, and for how long. Safe spaces remind both you and your partner that fighting the “problem” presents an opportunity to connect and create positivity. Fighting with each other presents opportunity to create more negative interactions.

**“Small Things Often”**

Gottman also speaks of the following concept: “small things often.” Positive interactions are not limited to the grandiose, like an expensive dinner out on the town. Positive interactions also include the small things. Making your partner a cup of coffee along with yours could be a positive interaction to start the day. Holding your partner’s hand on the couch or during a “social distancing” walk could inspire another positive interaction. A kind word such as, “We can get through this together!” could inspire even more. These actions show your partner that you care for them in multiple ways. The importance of this concept is not only that positive action occur, but that they occur often.

“Words are our most inexhaustible source of magic, capable of both inflicting injury and remedying it,” said popular author J.K. Rowling.

The “magic ratio” is greatly influenced by the words that we speak. Negative words can inflict the largest damage on our relationships. Consistently reaching for positive words minimizes the effects of negative interactions.

In a world that is constantly evolving daily, sometimes minute-by-minute, we could all introduce a little magic into our relationships.

If you are having trouble creating this magic in the storm that we are currently in, know that you don’t have to figure it out alone. There are many resources available. Sunbeam offers counseling services to individuals, couples, and families. If you are interested in these services, please complete a referral at <https://sunbeamfamilyservices.org/couns>eling or call (405) 528-7721.

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About Sunbeam Family Services

Founded in 1907, Sunbeam Family Services is one of Oklahoma’s longest serving nonprofits and is one of the original United Way of Central Oklahoma Community partners. Sunbeam’s mission is to provide help, hope and the opportunity to succeed through Early Childhood, Counseling, Foster Care and Senior Services. To learn more, call 405-528-7721, visit sunbeamfamilyservices.org, or join the conversation on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.