Building and Maintaining Connections

Living Well Workshop
Office of Graduate Student Life
University of Maryland
Tuesday, November 15, 2011

Presented by:
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Agenda

• Introductions & Expectations
• Icebreaker
• Growth-fostering Relationships
• Family Philosophies of Emotion in Relationships
• Balance in Relationships
• Rituals in Relationships
Objectives

• Participants will
  1. Gain greater insight into the ways in which they give and receive social and emotional support in their relationships
  2. Learn strategies for making time to nurture and maintain relationships
  3. Discuss tips for staying in touch with family and friends, with a focus on long distance relationships
Icebreaker

• How do you know when you are in a good relationship?

OR

• How do you know when you are experiencing challenges in a relationship?
5 Good Things in Growth-Fostering Relationships

1. A sense of *zest* or well-being that comes from connecting with another person or other persons.
2. The ability and motivation to *take action* in the relationship as well as other situations.
3. *Increased knowledge* of oneself and the other person(s).
4. An increased *sense of worth*.
5. A desire for *more connections* beyond the particular one.
5 Not-So-Good Things

1. Diminished zest or energy
2. Inability to act
3. Confusion or lack of clarity
4. Diminished sense of worth
5. Avoidance of relationships or isolation
Bids For Connection

- Bird-by-bird metaphor
- Relationships are built one encounter (bid) at a time
- Responses to a bid for connection
  - Turning toward
  - Turning against
  - Turning away
Philosophy of Emotion

- Emotion and Relationships
- Questions for self reflection
  - How aware are you of your own emotions?
  - How aware are you of the emotions of others?
  - How do you express your emotions?
  - How do emotions impact your connections with others?
Philosophy of Emotion – Feelings about Feelings

• What are your feelings underlie the emotions themselves?
  – Inappropriate to express sadness?
  – Wrong to get angry?

• Philosophy of Emotion - Collective beliefs and feelings about emotions

• What was your family’s Philosophy of Emotion
  – Brief exercise
Exercise: Scoring

• Mostly A → Emotion-dismissing
• Mostly B → Emotion-coaching
• Mostly C → Laissez-faire
• Mostly D → Emotion-disapproving
Emotion Coaching

• May have high regard for emotional expression
• Coaching families typically turn toward one another’s bid for emotional connection
• Help identify their feelings and empathize
• May have difficulty understanding when other people dismiss or disapprove of emotions
• “I understand how you feel. Let me help you.”
Emotion Dismissing

- May have been subtly (or not so subtly) discouraged from expressing emotions
- Many reasons why people may dismiss others' emotions
- May miss changes for emotional connection
- “You’ll get over it” or “Cheer up”
Emotion Disapproving

- May have a lot in common with emotion dismissing (e.g., encouraged to keep negative emotions under wraps)
- Can feel hostile towards those who express emotions like sadness, fear, anger
- Can feel like emotional intimacy leads to trouble
- “You shouldn’t feel that way” or “You’d better change your attitude”
Laissez-Faire

• High tolerance for emotional expression
• Emotional expression may be like “letting off steam”
  – Once the storm is over, the work is done
• Can validate the emotion, yet sometimes lacks guidance or help
• “I understand how you feel.”
Philosophy of Emotion

• Discussion
Balancing Act – Time management

• What makes it hard to balance relationships with graduate school?
• What are a couple of strategies that you have learned…
  – To make time for relationships?
  – To make time for academic demands?
Assertive Communication

• Assertive Communication
  - A behavioral approach that is directed and appropriate in expressing your own wants and needs without doing so at the expense of others

• Assertiveness could mean
  - Standing up for one’s rights
  - Expressing one’s true feelings
  - Not letting others take advantage of you

• Components
  - Being able to ask for something
  - Being able to deny something for which someone has asked
  - Being able to express negative feelings when you are unhappy with someone or something
  - Being able to express positive feelings when you like something or someone
Spotlight on Saying No

- Cultural Considerations
- Worksheet
Strategies for Connecting

• Rituals of emotional connection
  – Can help build stronger bonds
  – Can provide structure to your life to ensure continued connection
  – Give you a opportunity for emotional exchange that you can count on
  – Generally has symbolic meaning (Brushing teeth vs. goodnight kiss)
  – Informal (greetings) or Formal (holidays)

• Some established rituals may have needed to change with graduate school

• What are some of your rituals? Ideas for rituals?
  – Activity
Workshop review: Building and Maintaining Relationships

• Growth-fostering Relationships
  – 5 relationship qualities
• Family Philosophies of Emotion in Relationships
• Balance in Relationships
  – Assertive Communication and saying no
• Rituals in Relationships
Final Thoughts

- Questions?
- Concerns?
- Final thoughts?
UMD Counseling Center Resources

- Individual & Couples’ Counseling
- Parent Consultation
- Groups
  - Dissertation Support Group
  - Happy Hour – Positive Psychology Group
  - Graduate Student Group

Shoemaker Building
301-314-7651
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