



SAMARITAN COUNSELING CENTER
OF THE CAPITAL REGION

SOLUTIONS

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RELATIONAL INTIMACY

SPRING 2004

SAMARITAN
COUNSELING CENTER

and

Capital Region
Theological Center
present

Part Three of the
**Sustaining Pastoral
Excellence Series**

Sponsored by Siena College
and Lilly Endowment, Inc.

*From Idolatry to Grace:
The Spiritual Work of
Marriage*

This workshop will explore the spiritual work of marriage. Themes such as forgiveness, acceptance, grace and redemption are all important themes in marriage that are often not addressed. Marriage can be a crucible for spiritual development.

(Please see details on page 3.)

Steps to Intimacy

David C. Olsen, PhD

How intimate is your relationship? If you were to rate it on a scale of 1-10 where would you rate your relational intimacy? And how would your partner rate it? Before you answer too quickly would you and your partner even define intimacy in the same way? Often one person in a relationship defines intimacy as great sex while the other defines it as emotional connection. So evaluating the level of intimacy is far from easy. What can be worse is when one says, "We'd be more intimate if we had great sex," while the other says, "We'd have great sex if we were more intimate."

At the same time, many people wish their relationships were more intimate. The reality, however, is that intimacy takes work, clarity and courage. If you want to improve the level of intimacy in your relationship there are several steps that lead to greater intimacy.

First, **check your definitions.** Most couples mistakenly think they mean the same thing when they talk about intimacy. The reality is that there are many different definitions of intimacy. These include sexual intimacy, emotional intimacy, recreational intimacy, aesthetic intimacy, intimacy through parenting, as well as spiritual intimacy. Most couples enjoy intimacy in at least one of these areas. A first step toward creating a more intimate marriage is to assess which areas of intimacy are already working, and then agree on what type of intimacy should be worked on next. Compare your definitions of intimacy with your partner, and try to agree on a common goal of where you would like intimacy to increase. Having a shared goal is an important beginning.

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The next step to a more intimate relationship is to **understand the relational "dance"** that forms around the quest for intimacy, especially when you get anxious. Some people when anxious move toward closeness or even fusion. They become pursuers. Others, when anxious, move in the opposite direction – toward distance. A significant problem occurs when one pursues in the quest for greater closeness, while the other often moves in the opposite direction – toward distance. Their "dance" goes around and around and guarantees that intimacy cannot be achieved. For intimacy to increase, the "dance" must shift. Other relational patterns include the over-/under-functioning pattern, the dominant/submissive pattern, the conflict avoidant pattern, and the rapid escalating pattern where discussions escalate quickly into arguments. All of these dances block the emergence of intimacy. In order for intimacy to increase, try shifting your part of the pattern.

If you pursue when anxious, try to do the opposite. If on the other hand you tend to distance, try engaging your partner. If you tend to rapidly escalate conflict then make an attempt to slow things down and try to listen to your partner. Shifting your specific part of your dance can allow intimacy to emerge. Too often these patterns block intimacy from improving.

A third step is to **find out from your partner what you can do that will help them feel loved.** Ask them to give you several positive things you can do that will help them feel loved. Make sure it is specific as opposed to vague, and positive as opposed to negative. "Stop being a jerk", or "be more romantic" are not helpful suggestions because they

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Group Therapy Opportunities

Please call (518) 374-3514 for information about all groups and workshops.

▶ All Groups are facilitated by a therapist and are completely confidential. ◀

CLERGY SPOUSE SUPPORT

- ◆ 90 Minutes weekly, ongoing
- ◆ Focuses on the challenges of being a pastor's spouse, including responsibilities and unrealistic expectations.
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CONTACT: Keli Rugenstein

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Confidential support and discussion for

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- ◆ Life changes
- ◆ Moves and decisions
- ◆ Spiritual direction and collegiality

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WOMEN AND DEPRESSION

- ◆ 90 Minutes weekly, ongoing
- ◆ For women dealing with depression
- ◆ Focuses on issues pertinent to women, their families and their lives, and seeks to empower participants
- ◆ In conjunction with individual therapy

CONTACT: Pam Ennis

WOMEN'S TRAUMA SURVIVORS

- ◆ 90 minutes weekly, ongoing
- ◆ Focuses on the present and on interpersonal relationships
- ◆ In conjunction with individual therapy
- ◆ Offered in Albany and Scotia

CONTACT: Pam Ennis (Albany) Patty Gillen (Scotia)

Intimacy and Conflict

Keli Rugenstein, CSW


Conflict is a necessary part of deepening intimacy. When conflict is worked through, it leads to greater intimacy. On the other hand, when either buried or handled poorly, the development of intimacy is blocked.

A pattern of conflict can form easily around any issue in a relationship. For example, "We wouldn't have any problems if she'd just have sex more often!" is usually countered with, "We wouldn't have any problems if he didn't want sex so often!" Sex, like other couple issues (i.e. money, kids, in-laws) can look like the problem in a relationship when it has actually become the holding area for many issues. Our partners are important to us and it can feel as though they think less of us when they don't agree with our point of view or opinion on a subject. Topics and issues can become toxic so they are avoided – but they still exist. Differences of opinion and misinterpreted behaviors begin to feel like disinterest and mistrust. Bring disinterest and mistrust into the bedroom and sex becomes the problem! Again intimacy suffers.

Working through these conflicts takes great courage, commitment and skill. Unfortunately, many couples say that

they just don't communicate any more. In fact, they are communicating all the time. Avoiding conflict is a way of communicating. Words aren't the only way we say things to each other. When we are using behavior (i.e. tone of voice, disinterest, lots of time away from each other), many times it is because we don't want to (or know how to) put our feelings into words.

Moving towards conflict, and stating what you really feel, especially when your partner disagrees, takes discipline. Not becoming reactive, white working towards problem-solving compromise, takes real commitment. It is far too easy to feel that our partner isn't there for us and doesn't really love us in the midst of this process.

Changing communication patterns will improve your relationship. You can begin to change your pattern by deciding what you feel at these times and sharing it with your partner. It isn't easy and your partner will be surprised and unsure how to react. Trying to do this as a couple is a behavior that says, "You and this relationship are worth the effort!" 

Recommended Reading On the Topic of Intimacy

[Passionate Marriage: Keeping Love & Intimacy Alive in Committed Relationships](#)

David Schnarch

The greatest sexual pleasure in a person's lifetime is possible in one's middle and later years, asserts Dr. David Schnarch, when a mature sense of self has been achieved and genuine intimacy is possible with another person.

[The Couple's Survival Workbook](#)

David C. Olsen, PhD, CSW

Douglas Stephens, EdD, CSW

Are you locked into the same old song and dance of boredom, ancient anger, unmet expectations, chronic frustrations, and disappointment? By changing your role you can change your relationship.

[Getting the Love You Want: A Guide for Couples](#)

Harville Hendrix

Bestselling author Dr. Harville Hendrix offers warm, intelligent advice for transforming an intimate relationship into a lasting source of love and companionship.


Steps to Intimacy

(continued from page 1)

are not concrete. "Give me a hug and tell me you love me before you leave for work," or "Let's go for a walk at least three times a week and catch up" are examples of positive requests. If practiced these small steps will increase a sense of intimacy.

[Finally, be able to ask for what you need.](#)

Your partner will never get to the point where they can read your mind. Too often couples lock themselves in a cycle of misery by hoping that their partner will figure out what they need and provide it without them asking. "If after all this time I have to ask, then it isn't worth it" is a phrase I often hear. But for intimacy to improve we have to be clear about what we need and ask.

Intimacy in the end is the by-product of shared definitions and improved communication. It is contingent on being committed to learning more about what your partner needs and trying to meet those needs, as well as having the courage to ask for what you need. To grow and flourish, intimacy, like a garden, must be carefully and lovingly tended. 

Upcoming Events

A Retreat for Survivors of Clergy Sexual Abuse

With Rev. Pamela Pater-Ennis

Date: Saturday, July 10, 2004
 Time: Registration at 8:30 am, Event 9:00 am - 3:00 pm
 Place: First Reformed Church in Scotia
 224 Ballston Avenue, Scotia, NY
 Cost: \$45 per participant

Please call (518) 374-3514 for more information or to RSVP by July 5.

From Idolatry to Grace

Date: Wednesday, November 3, 2004
 Time: 9:00 am to 1:00 pm
 (lunch is provided)
 Place: Sarazen Student Union Building
 Room 241-243, Siena College

Pre-registration is required before October 19. Please call Capital Region Theological Center at (518) 462-2470 for more information.

Yes, I would like to become a Silent Samaritan.
Please designate this gift toward:

___ #1: Kids at Academic Risk (Project PASS)
 ___ #2: Survivors of Sexual Abuse (Project Recovery)
 ___ #3: Strengthening Families (The Couple's Clinic)
 ___ #4: Wherever it will do the greatest good.

Enclosed is my tax-deductible donation for:
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PLEASE MAKE CHECK PAYABLE TO:
 Samaritan Counseling Center of the Capital Region and mail to
 220 North Ballston Ave., Scotia, NY 12302. Thank you!

How Intimate is your Marriage?

Take a few minutes and complete this inventory, compare the results with your partner, and use the results as a springboard for discussion.

The Marital Closeness Scale below will help in assessing the degree of trust, intimacy and communication in your marriage. Rate your marriage on each of the following characteristics by circling the answer that best describes your sentiment – Strongly Agree, Agree, Not Sure, Disagree, Strongly Disagree. Take the survey separately and then compare the results with your spouse.



♥ **Companionship.** I feel that my partner and I are good friends.

SA A NS D SD

♥ **Regard.** I feel that we are thoughtful and considerate of each other's feelings and needs.

SA A NS D SD

♥ **Empathy.** I am satisfied with the level of sensitivity and empathy expressed in our relationship.

SA A NS D SD

♥ **Discussion.** I feel that we talk enough about things that hold my interest.

SA A NS D SD

♥ **Communications.** I feel that my spouse really listens to me.

SA A NS D SD

♥ **Compassion.** I am satisfied with the kindness we demonstrate toward one another.

SA A NS D SD

♥ **Sincerity.** I feel that my partner and I do our best to communicate and show our authentic selves to one another.

SA A NS D SD

♥ **Honesty.** I feel that we trust each other completely.

SA A NS D SD

♥ **Identity.** I am comfortable with how my partner and I allow each other to be ourselves.

SA A NS D SD

♥ **Conflict.** I understand and believe my partner understands what makes each of us angry and how we will respond when we are angry.

SA A NS D SD

♥ **Resolution.** I feel that we both work well under stressful circumstances to resolve our conflicts.

SA A NS D SD

♥ **Affection.** I am satisfied with the way in which we both initiate and respond to physical closeness.

SA A NS D SD

♥ **Justice.** I feel that we both make sacrifices and are willing to compromise for the benefit of our relationship over individual desires.

SA A NS D SD

♥ **Reliability.** I feel that we can both trust in each other's word: that what we each promise the other will happen.

SA A NS D SD

♥ **Commitment.** I feel that my partner and I share the same degree of work at maintaining our relationship.

SA A NS D SD

♥ **Sexuality.** I feel that my partner and I are mostly compatible sexually: that we are willing to give what each other wants, and are mostly satisfied with what we receive.

SA A NS D SD

♥ **Autonomy.** I feel that our relationship does not require that I give up things that are very important to me.

SA A NS D SD

Be careful not to use the results as a basis for blaming or proving anything. Change doesn't occur when people feel defensive. Instead, use your answers and your reasoning behind them as a basis for discussing what you would both like to see change and ways to do it.

Adapted from "How Does Your Marriage Rate?" The Psychotherapy Letter, © 1994, Manisses Communications Group, Inc., PO Box 3357, Providence, RI 02906



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