

“Health Check”

SOLUTIONS

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Health Check : *Your Marriage*

David Olsen PhD
Executive Director

What do healthy marriages look like? Contrary to popular opinion, healthy couples are not free from conflict. They do not have perfect communication skills. In fact, there is no stereotypical “healthy marriage.” As the news often reveals, what looks healthy can mask deep dysfunction. While it is difficult to describe the perfect couple, healthy marriages do share some common traits.

Healthy couples have accepted the ultimate relationship reality: the only person you can change is yourself. Healthy partners do not engage in the futile effort of trying to change each other.

Healthy couples realize that “life happens” – change, both good and bad occurs, and those couples who are healthy learn to adapt to what life brings.

Healthy couples create and sustain a deep friendship with each other. The research of John Gottman defines deep friendship as a “mutual respect for and enjoyment of each other’s company.”

Healthy couples have learned “metacommunication” skills. They can communicate about the way they communicate and learn to recognize and shift relationship patterns such as pursuer / distancer or rapid escalation.

Healthy couples are empathically tuned in to each other. Each partner knows the other’s strengths and weaknesses, and focuses on drawing those best qualities.

Healthy couples recognize that no one comes from a perfect family and are aware of each other’s old wounds. Couples often unconsciously hope their partner will help them heal from old wounds. Marriage can be redemptive when each

partner attempts to address the wounds of the other.

Healthy couples have an intimate relationship. They learn to understand each other’s understanding of intimacy, develop shared definitions of intimacy, and build an intimate relationship.

Healthy couples recognize that even the best marriages cannot meet every need of each partner. Healthy couples cultivate a spiritual dimension, and spiritual intimacy in their commitment to something greater than themselves. ☪

New Book

The Spiritual Work of Marriage
by David Olsen, PhD

Learn how to help couples to navigate and resolve the spiritual themes present in marriage

The *Spiritual Work of Marriage* comprehensively discusses an issue that is central to addressing committed relationships and intimacy—the difficult, and yet very common, spiritual work that exists within marriage. This insightful guide goes deeper into ways to improve marital intimacy by explaining its spiritual dimension and describing a variety of spiritual themes that every couple deals with and must resolve. The book contains practical case study material, questions for group discussion, and a series of spiritual and theological theories tied to powerful marital dynamics.

24.95, Routledge, ISBN 0789036339

Training Director Jenness Clairmont, LCSW LMFT has earned AAMFT-approved supervisor status, following in-depth training and clinical supervision. She is also the President-elect of the New York Association for Marriage and Family Therapy Albany-Hudson Chapter. Justin Reimschneider LMSW and Oona Edmands LMSW have completed their Residency in Psychotherapy and have joined the Center’s clinical staff.

Staff Update



Health Check : *Your Parenting*

David Olsen, PhD
Executive Director

In the midst of the back-to-school shopping, meeting with teachers and adjusting to new schedules, parents want to know that their children will be healthy and successful. Several factors contribute to health in both families and children:

Healthy Families make it clear who is in charge. Healthy parents know that their child does not run the show. They are not afraid to say no and they do not try to be their child's friend.

Healthy Parents set developmentally appropriate boundaries. Boundaries, while never popular with children, are essential for child development. Parents recognize that boundaries must shift as children develop so they will learn to take on more responsibility. For example, an early curfew would be very appropriate for a twelve year old, but this might be relaxed as the child gets older.

Healthy Parents guide their children towards autonomy so their child will develop an internalized sense of responsibility that will be vital as he or she grows up.

Healthy Families know whose needs are important. Parents recognize the importance of meeting their child's needs, as opposed to the child meeting the parents' needs for security and self-esteem. The infamous "Little League Father" or the mother obsessed her child's choice of college might be operating from their own needs and buried wishes, not their child's.

Healthy Families are empathic. They are not only concerned with clear structure, but also deeply in tune with their child: nurturing dreams and supporting goals, understanding what is important to him or her, and making sure the child feels understood. 🙏

Health Check : *Yourself*

Oona Edmands, LMSW and
David Olsen, PhD

Millions of dollars are spent on advertisements about appearance and physical health. From clothing and make-up tips to recipes, gym memberships and the latest fitness fad, the message is clear: get in shape. In our society, we place much less emphasis on getting our inner self in shape. It is equally important for your internal self to be healthy and "in shape." In fact, very few people know what it means to be in good mental shape. Here are some factors:

The ability to connect with others. In our work with couples and families, it is often striking how often people interrupt each other and have trouble looking each other in the eyes. This is often the case when we are not feeling OK about ourselves and our minds are cluttered and preoccupied.

The ability to adapt to changing circumstances. The only thing we can count on is change. However, most of us resist it and have a hard time adjusting when things are not going as planned. The ability to relax and respond skillfully to changes is an essential factor in mental health.

The ability to manage emotions. It is hard for most of us to integrate our hearts and our heads. For some of us, we fly off the handle and react without thinking through the consequences. For others, we appear calm and rational but bury our feelings deeply and hide them from others. Managing emotions means to integrate heart and mind, acknowledging our feelings but being able to calm ourselves down, consider other perspectives and express ourselves without damaging relationships.

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The ability to find meaning and joy in life. Imagine you are stuck in a dead end job, in a cubicle under fluorescent lights. What would keep you going? For some, it is the joy they experience outside of work with family, friends, in nature, listening to music, or other ways to uplift their lives. For others, it might be planning their future career, sticking to goals and moving forward. Finding meaning means to use inner resources of creativity and mindfulness to uplift even the most depressing circumstances.

The capacity to sit with emptiness. In contrast to the ability to find meaning in life, there are times where it seems that there is no way to turn. St. John of the Cross termed this the "dark night of the soul." Eastern sages refer to this as the "broken heart of sadness." Maybe a relationship is breaking up or we have lost a loved one. There are times when we cannot improve or change things no matter what we do. The capacity to appreciate this heartbreak and be with it (instead of trying to keep ourselves busy or self-medicating with alcohol or new relationships). This deepens us as people, increases our ability to be compassionate to others, and ultimately helps us be more open to the spiritual side of life.

The ability to distinguish between shadow and person. There are parts of all of us that are aggressive, rageful, lustful. Freud called this the "id." Problems obviously arise when we give into these impulses and act destructively. But there are also problems in denying this shadow and imagining that we are not angry people or that we never feel jealousy. The capacity to integrate the shadow and our more socially acceptable selves takes self-awareness, the ability to manage emotions and appreciate emptiness. 🙏

For more information on any of Samaritan Counseling Center's Programs or Services, visit our website at www.samaritancounselingcenter.org

Carl Jung, Pastoral Care and Mindfulness

A Clergy and Congregation Care Workshop

Wednesday, October 29th
9 AM to Noon

First Reformed Church of Scotia
224 N. Ballston Ave.
Scotia

\$35

includes continental breakfast
Please call (518) 374-3514
to RSVP by October 22nd

“People will do anything, no matter how absurd, to avoid facing their own soul.”

Carl Gustav Jung

This workshop will explore the impact of Jung’s work on pastoral care and spiritual formation. In particular, we will explore the work of integrating the “shadow.” What is your shadow and how does it affect your pastoral care? How can identifying your shadow be a benefit to those you work with and serve? How do you find out just what your shadow really is?

The practice of mindfulness can be a profoundly spiritual experience. Through various methods of mindfulness practice, we cultivate grace, mercy, and compassion for ourselves, and especially for our shadows.

Led by David Olsen PhD, LCSW, LMFT and Oona Edmands LMSW

Read more about Mindfulness at www.clergyinstitute.org

Health Check : *You & Your World*

Jeness Clairmont, LCSW LMFT

Every aspect of our lives—work, friendships, dating and families—contains relationships. But few of us have a clear sense about what makes these relationships healthy or unhealthy. A healthy relationship can hold many different dynamics, depending on the life circumstances of both people. There are a few things, however, that continue to show up in relationships that grow and thrive.

The ability to recognize the dynamic in the relationship. Do you typically over-function or under-function, are you over-responsible or under-responsible? Do you distance yourself when some one approaches you, or do you pursue when the other is clearly trying to avoid you? It is common for each of these to happen, but also a good idea to be able to recognize patterns and then take stock of what is working and what is not. If it isn’t working, people in healthy relationships are flexible enough to try something else.

The ability to set healthy boundaries. They don’t need to be rigid and unchanging, but it is okay to say no when you are feeling overloaded, and then all right to say yes when you have more energy. It is important not to confuse selfishness with healthy self-care.

The ability to take responsibility for your own feelings and behavior-only. To want to rescue others when they are hurting is natural. More useful is just be-

ing with someone when they are struggling rather than trying to fix it. It is a wonderful thing to be emotionally intelligent and to be mindful of how others perceive us. However, very emotionally conscientious people often overdo it; they take responsibility for themselves AND the other. This limits the ability for the other person to take stock of what they are feeling.

The ability to manage conflict. Conflict happens; it always has and always will. It can be a healthy honest part of a relationship. Conflict can bring people closer, and to a deeper understanding of each other. Managing it requires mindfulness. Healthier conflict has a few rules—keep it about what you were originally arguing about; no low blows; don’t triangle others in (it is tempting to seek an outside opinion, but it usually makes it worse); don’t call names (people forgive, but they rarely forget) and make statements only about yourself (harder to do, but it actually works). Lastly, try to actually hear the other person and what they are saying.

There is no such thing as a perfect relationship, but the ones marked by reciprocity and honesty are more healthy and strong. We all have a natural intuitive sense of how to do these things, we just don’t always use it, especially when we feel hurt, slighted or confused. It is very easy to get caught up in another’s actions, what is trickier and more useful is to tap into how we are feeling and use that as a guide for our own behavior. 🧘

Help Others Stay Healthy

Imagine the dismal future of an at-risk adolescent dropping out of school. Consider the tragedy of an escalating divorce rate, and the impact of divorce on children’s futures. Did you know depression can significantly impair a parent’s ability to take care of their children? These are serious problems requiring Samaritan Solutions, and these days, we are seeing more clients than ever before. Your support of our Silent Samaritan Fund will enable us to provide services to uninsured and underinsured people who seek our help to deal with the problems that disrupt their everyday lives. Our skilled clinical staff provides counseling for individuals, couples and families in the Capital Region.

Please join us and support our Silent Samaritan Program! Your gift of \$1000, \$500, \$250, \$100 or whatever you can give, will help us provide therapy sessions for these clients. As a member of our family of Silent Samaritans, you can be assured that your quiet generosity will assist those in our community who are most vulnerable and in need of our services.

For your convenience, a gift response envelope has been included with this newsletter.

Silent Samaritans are People of Strength helping People in need!

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Address Change? Duplicate Mailings?

If your address has changed or if you receive more than one copy of our newsletter, please alert our office at (518) 374-3514 so that we can streamline our database. Thank you!

Solutions is published by Samaritan Counseling Center of the Capital Region, 220 North Ballston Ave., Scotia, NY 12302, (518) 374-3514, fax: (518) 374-9193, online at www.samaritancounselingcenter.org.

Samaritan Services: Individual, Couples, and Family Therapy, Educational Workshops, Professional/Organizational Consultation and Supervision.

Office Locations: Schenectady/Scotia, Albany, Rensselaer, Clifton Park, Jonesville, Wilton. Please call the Scotia office at (518) 374-3514 to schedule an appointment. Financial statements for Samaritan Counseling Center of the Capital Region are available upon request through the New York State Attorney General's office.