

Clarke Counseling Center

Monthly Newsletter

SEPTEMBER 2010



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Coming Events

Oct. 16, 2010 -
Speaking engagement:
AMCAP (Association of
Mormon Counselors and
Psychotherapists)
Topic : "Adults with AD/HD,
how it impacts the family"
Location: Mt. Vernon, VA

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Greetings!

So often, we must deal with difficult situations and even difficult people. Are we prepared to do so? Fortunately, there is a great deal of research into some key skills that can help us in even the most disturbing and difficult conversations.

Read on to learn about a couple of important skills. You'll be glad you did. But no one is perfectly adept at handling difficulties in life. Often, we need someone to help us get past troubling obstacles; someone who has the experience and training to make a difference in our lives.



My experience and training are in the following areas:

- [Life Coaching](#)
- [Adult AD/HD](#)
- [Marriage and Family Therapy](#)

Please contact me to discuss how I might be able to help.

Sincerely,

Sherry Clarke MA, LCMFT

Conversation "Safety"

How To Deal With Those Difficult Situations

Johnny comes home from school, walks past you in the kitchen, and reeks of cigarettes.

You find Sarah's report card hidden in her room and discover she has earned two F's. Your husband buys a very expensive sound system without consulting you first. Your boss makes an offensive comment about you in front of your co-workers. How do you handle these situations? A few key skills can go a long way in helping us deal with difficult situations.



In the book, [Crucial Conversations](#) (Patterson, Grenny, McMillan, Switzler, 2002, McGraw-Hill), the authors discuss the fact that the average person has a "crucial conversation" at least 1-2 times per week. What makes a conversation crucial? According to the authors, they are conversations where opinions vary, the stakes are high and strong emotions are prevalent. And, according to the authors, the more crucial the conversation, the less likely we are to handle it well without having some key skills under our belts.

One key skill for holding a successful, crucial conversation is to recognize when a conversation has become "emotionally unsafe" for either party. You'll know when someone feels emotionally unsafe when they display one of two sets of behaviors:

1) silence, or 2) violence.

You might have a conversation with Johnny that sounds something like this:

"Johnny, have you been smoking?"

"No."

"Then why do your clothes reek of cigarettes?"

"I don't know."

"Johnny, have you been hanging around with Tim again? Didn't we talk about him two months ago?"

(Johnny shrugs)

"Are you hanging out with Tim again?"

(Johnny walks out of the room)

Notice that Johnny feels "unsafe" in having this discussion with you. He has gone to silent mode. He might just as well have gone to "violent" mode by becoming aggressive, threatening or name-calling. "Get out of my face!" "You hypocrite!" "You are trying to control me!"

Learning to recognize when someone feels unsafe in a conversation is a key skill. Once we've learned to recognize this phenomenon, we must then learn how to handle it. Essentially, to restore emotional safety we must pull out of the CONTENT of the conversation and deal with the real problem of the moment - Johnny is feeling unsafe. In other words, we need to acknowledge that the other party is feeling unsafe (and, perhaps we need to acknowledge that we, ourselves, are not feeling safe) and take steps to restore that safety.

We might say:

"Johnny, I'm sorry if it seems like I'm trying to control you. Actually, I do catch myself trying to do that sometimes and I'm working on it. If someone was trying to control me, I know I wouldn't like it one bit. . . . But I'm feeling really frightened right now. "

This kind of conversation has a much better chance of success with Johnny because it is honest and deals with the problem of emotional safety. Only when we see that Johnny feels emotionally safe about the conversation can we actually discuss his choice of friends or his possible use of cigarettes.

When there is emotional safety, we can discuss literally anything with anyone. But pulling back from the content of a conversation to deal with safety is a difficult thing to do because our own emotions are involved and we so desperately want to make our voices heard. However, when we allow our own emotions to get in the way, there is little chance we'll be heard and understood in the way we would like.

Learning a few skills to help us in crucial conversations will help us in all our relationships.

Counselor's Corner

How To Show Love To Your Children

This month's newsletter focuses on relationships and how to communicate our true feelings. So here's a few suggestions for the most important relationship of parenting.

Frequently I am asked to work with teens who are "acting out" and the parent/child relationship is very strained. What I most often hear is: "Mom/Dad don't love me, don't listen and hear me, are busy doing



their own stuff." I assure the teen that Mom/Dad do love them, they just don't know how to show it - to send the love message so that the teen receives it.

Parents often spend much more time reprimanding than praising. S. Michael

Wilcox, a retired professor, recently taught, "Children need a balance of nurture and admonition. With all nurturing and no admonishing, a child may become spoiled, unprepared for the world he'll live in, and manipulative. If there's too much admonition, he may get rebellious or too scared to do anything for fear of what might happen."

As a therapist I see teens who are discouraged, depressed or anxious. Let's have balance between the two - nurturing and admonition.

Research has also shown that we need at least 8-9 praises for every order or criticism. How are you doing with that ratio? Some positive ideas to accomplish above are:

1. Respect your child as a human being.
2. Trust in your child's ability to function effectively.
3. Remember that caring discipline is a form of love.
4. Do not shame or blame your child: be positive, not negative.
5. Give your child your undivided attention when he talks to you.
6. Spend as much time as possible with your child - quality plus quantity.
7. Have family dinner hours where communicating (talking about the day) is as important as the food eaten.

Til next month

Sherry

Interesting Quotes About Families

"I don't care how poor a man is; if he has family he's rich." - Dan Wilcox and Thad Mumford

"The family is a haven in a heartless world." - Johann Schiller

"The family. We were a strange little band of characters trudging through life sharing diseases and toothpaste, coveting one another's desserts, hiding shampoo, borrowing money, locking each other out of our rooms, inflicting pain and kissing to heal it in the same instant, loving, laughing, defending, and trying to figure out the common thread that bound us all together." - Erma Bombeck

"The family - that dear octopus from whose tentacles we never quite escape, nor, in our inmost hearts, ever quite wish to." - Dodie Smith

"Family life is a bit like a runny peach pie - not perfect but who's



complaining?" - Robert Brault

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