

Tri-County Batterer Intervention Provider Network Meeting minutes--9/08/2009

Present: Chris Huffine (Allies in Change Counseling Center), Jacquie Pancoast (ChangePoint), Dean Camarda (Allies in Change/Men's Resource Center), Paula Manley (Manley Interventions), Chad McGhee (Allies in Change), Emily Szeliga (Allies in Change), Melinda Sherman (MRC), Samantha Naliboff (VOA Home Free), Jennifer Warren (MRC/Women's Counseling Center), Annie Neal (Mult. County DV Coordinator's Office), Leonard Larson (Abuse Recovery Ministry Services), Roberto Olivero (MRC), Shaun Larson (ARMS), Johnnie Burt (ARMS), Kimarie Calhoun (Allies in Change), Regina Rosann (ARMS), Stacey Womack (ARMS), Sara Windsheimer (Choices DVIP), Guruseva Mason (Choices)

Minutes by Chris Huffine and Johnnie Burt

Meeting Topic: John Gottman Overview

Presented by Chris Huffine. This is intended to be a brief summary/overview of the work done by John Gottman, Ph.D. and his colleagues. John Gottman is a researcher and trainer based in Seattle. He has done extensive research on what distinguishes successful/happy romantic relationships from unsuccessful/unhappy ones. He has been doing this work for the better part of two decades and has examined thousands of couples over that time including various races, classes, and sexual orientations, among others. He has published a number of books for the general public as well as articles in academic journals. He typically offers training on his findings once every year or two in the Portland area as well as several times a year in the Seattle area. He also offers workshops for couples in the Seattle area several times a year.

-The primary predictor of longevity in 1st world countries is not health/medical issues, but the quality of your relationships.

-As women have gained greater economic equality, the divorce rate has gone up. The empowerment of women has also led to an increased divorce rate.

-There are only two circumstances where he does not feel couples counseling is appropriate: when [traditional, physical] domestic violence is present and/or if there is an on-going affair.

-A 20 minute interview predicts divorce with 94% accuracy. Three minutes of observation can accomplish about the same.

Premise: Gottman's work is actually describing abusive relationships in striking detail and with striking accuracy without using the words "domestic violence" or "abuse". He typically characterizes domestic violence in a more traditional manner, with a focus on physical abuse. But the rest of his work is actually primarily focusing on emotional abuse while rarely using that actual language. It is this other work that has extensive relevance in our work with abusive men.

The Elements of Disfunction

1. More negativity than positivity

-Emotional Bank Account

- making regular deposits of appreciation, acknowledgement, kindness, etc
- starts with a positive balance, which can be increased by the above
- bad days, tough times, under appreciation, mistakes, etc all draw down on the balance
- in dysfunctional relationships this is running at a deficit

2. Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse

-1. Criticism (generalized critiques of the partner)

- This is in contrast to complaints--focusing on behaviors/feelings, which are good
- The magic ratio is 5:1 positive to negative comments this includes qualities like nodding, joking, listening attentively, etc
- positive alternative: complaints

-2. Contempt (disdain/negative value of the partner's worth)

- statements made from a position of superiority
- puts your partner down to lift yourself up
- this is the single best predictor of divorce
- most verbal and emotional abuse falls into this category
- It has got to stop or the marriage won't be able to survive
- It needs to be flagged in session and not tolerated (e.g., he rings a bell every time it happens)
- this has to be the very first priority of couples work
- positive alternative: admiration/appreciation (and repair attempts)

-3. Defensiveness

- not being open to input
- righteous indignation meets a perceived attack with a counter attack
- positive alternative: accountability/accepting responsibility

-4. Stone-walling

- emotional withdrawal and non-acknowledgement/responsiveness
- poor eye contact
- 85% of stone wallers are male
- This appears to be an attempt to calm themselves down [but there's no follow-up]
- positive alternative: self-soothing

3. Harsh start-up

- Defined as an abrupt jumping into negative affect vs. a gradual wading into conflict
- alludes to how to start a car--it needs to be allowed to lubricate before putting into gear (I.e., a soft start-up)
- A softened start-up involves greater warmth, speaking more from own experience, more acknowledging

4. Failure of repair

- Repair attempts are trying to improve the relationship in the moment.
- The most obvious are things like apologies or amends making. However they can be much

smaller gestures such as a joke, a compliment, restarting a conversation on a new topic, etc.

- Repair does not work if it is rejected. So it's really a two step process--repair attempt/acceptance of it.

- A failure of repair is not trying to make the situation better. The situation isn't revisited.

There's no follow-up. There are no "do overs". Or, the repair attempts are repeatedly rejected.

- Delayed repair when calmer may also work better. This is referred to as recovery.

5. Demand-withdrawal

- Issues are brought up and the other withdraws.

- Normally, 80% of the time it is the woman who brings up issues with the man more typically withdrawing.

- In violent relationships it's the reverse--the majority of issues are brought up by the man.

Two Common Negative Relational Patterns

- Attack/defend pattern, adversarial, escalating negative affect, and increased alienation.

Normally ends 7 years in.

- Emotional disengagement/suppression of negative affect, lack of positive emotions. Normally ends 16 years in. "The Big Chill"

 - A lot of marital conflict is due to conversations never had.

- The couple needs to shift from an adversarial to a collaborative stance.

6. Failure of men to accept the influence of women

- Accepting influence does not mean obeying, it means acknowledging. It can include a response, a head nod or other sorts of things. There's a correlation between men not accepting influence and the end of marriages. There's no such correlation for women.

7. Negative perception of the other

- Negative trait labeling qualities (e.g., selfish, lazy)

- Negative sentiment override

 - hypersensitivity and quick to take offense

 - chip on shoulder

 - [this is similar to the negative characterization of their partner that is common among the men we work with]

8. Flooding

- Feeling overwhelmed by the other's affect. Distance and isolation cascades--withdrawing to cope

9. Chronic diffuse physiological arousal

- This involves a person feeling constantly agitated. The family is on edge because he is on edge. Everyone else is aware of this and have to monitor self because they don't want to bother Dad. Self-soothing needs to be taught.

- It can include things like sighing, moving things around quickly, a heavy step, tone of voice, etc.

While anyone can have a certain intensity, it becomes more problematic when the person with that stance doesn't take responsibility for it and/or blames the family for it.

Sound Marital House Theory

- The three key domains necessary for a relationship to be successful (i.e., non-abusive):
 - friendship
 - shared meaning
 - constructive conflict

The 7 Keys to a Successful Marriage

1. Love maps

- Knowing your partner's psychological world
- Asking open ended questions
- Updating this knowledge periodically
- Knowing and being known
- Use questions

2. Fondness and admiration

- Affection
- A culture of appreciation
- When there is no more of this then the relationship is over

3. Turning toward vs. turning away

- Emotional bank account
- As you have a positive balance you're more likely to turn toward vs. negative you move away.
- Acknowledgement and appreciation
- Repair attempts
- Bids
 - Attempts to emotionally connect with the other/create intimacy (e.g., ask a question, make a comment, joke)
 - There can be 3 possible responses:
 - Turn towards/enthusiastically turn towards (e.g., laugh, respond, smile, nod)
 - Turn away/reject (e.g., put downs, dismiss, ignore)
 - Turn against (e.g., perceive the bid as an attack and strike back)
 - Intimacy failure produces conflict. Conflict failure produces intimacy failure
 - Conflict is about a pathway to intimacy. We don't want them to avoid conflict, but help them understand that constructive conflict improves intimacy. Must be done in a healthy way. You can't have a relationship that is free of conflict. But it should be healthy.

4. Positive sentiment override

- Emotional bank account is carrying a positive balance
- This is a buffer against irritability. Less quick to take things personally.
- [Consistent with positive self-talk and the whole assume she's your ally/on your side]
- More bendable/flexible with the other's bad mood, resistance, attitude, etc.

- This cannot be manipulated directly. Rather it shifts due to other aspects of life shifting.
- This is somewhat affected by one's own personal history and psychology, so it's level can precede the current relationship.

5. Regulation of conflict

- There is a consistency of issues within a relationship. The same issues tend to crop up over the years, 70% of the time. In other words, only 30% of on-going issues are ever resolved.
- Dialogue with the perpetual problems rather than trying to fix them.
 - Understanding them can help people get out of gridlock
 - [This is similar to the "Getting to Yes" model]
- You need to learn to cope with chronic problems. There will be differences in personality.
- You need to pick someone whose problems won't drive you nuts. When you're picking a partner, you're picking a set of problems as well.
- Little conflicts
 - Focus on little conflicts. They are more common, smaller, easier to be mindful, easier to change.
 - Seek change when there is no emotional escalation.
- Keys to dealing with conflict:
 - Softened start-up
 - Accepting influence
 - Repairing
 - Compromising
- Learn how to process conflicts. This is similar to Dan Wile's concept of platforming.
- The goal here is to move from gridlock to dialogue.

6. Dreams within conflict

- Rather than focusing on the content of the conflict, you need to focus on what the conflict symbolizes/means to the other person. What core values or issues is it tapping into?
 - [Core values=Getting to Yes model]
 - [Core issues=Getting the Love You Want/Harville Hendrix model of family of origin issues]
- Once you identify the core issue or value, then you can often move past the gridlock towards resolution. 86% resolved a gridlocked conflict over a 2 day period.
- This is the process of moving from gridlock to dialogue.
- Supporting one another's dreams turns conflict resolution into a positive experience
- [this is the concept of conflict being a pathway to intimacy]
- Steps to move out of gridlock via dreams within conflict:
 - Identify the dreams/values/core issues
 - Honor the dreams/values/core issues by changing the influence pattern
 - Follow-up on this/maintenance, since this will not often last.
 - Goal is NOT to solve the problem, although some will get solved along the way.

7. Creating shared meanings

- This refers to formal and informal rituals within a relationship that create emotional connection.
- Creating, acknowledging, and celebrating your relationship culture.

- This includes symbolic meanings, metaphors, narratives, allusions, etc.
- Creating/building this is an important part of solidifying a relationship.

Gridlock

- Feeling hurt/insulted
- No positive affect
- 4 horsemen may be present
- Feel rejected
- Entrenchment/polarization
- Vilification
- Emotional disengagement/distance

To get out of gridlock to dialogue

- Identify the symbolic meaning of positions, metaphors, narratives, etc
- Often times the real issue is deeper, more central [i.e., core issues]
- There is a “dream” behind the position, which needs to be identified
- This dream has a core meaning to the self
- Person may not feel entitled to have the dream
- Once the dream is identified, it can be directly addressed, acknowledged, and managed

Ways to open up attack/defend

- Create an internal dialectic, characterized by self-compassion, using self-focus and emotions
- Turn that into self-disclosure
- Identify the triggers and repeating negative cycles--these are the enduring vulnerabilities
- Identify where they are coming from [and tame them]. Platform with them
- Ritualize conflict discussions
 - softened start-up
 - accept influence
 - repair/deescalate
 - compromise [I’d say look for the win-win]
- Emotional attunement. [Listen compassionately and informationally]
 - [focus on just listening rather than trying to talk and listen]
- ”Conversations we never had”. Be preemptive in bringing up issues, in following up on things