

**Day 2 without  
sports. Found  
a lady sitting  
on my couch.  
Apparently  
she's my wife.  
She seems  
nice. 😎**

### Topics Covered

- Couple Dynamics
- Patterns
- Strategies
- Final Thoughts

# Mindful Mondays

04/20/2020

**Who else discovered that there is another adult living in your house? Did you know that you've been dating them? That you're married to them? Are they nice?**

**Social distancing and stay-at-home orders really shine the light on the people we live closest too. Sometimes we find out that they're cool, other times that light may feel like it's shining too brightly, and we start noticing things that we don't like.**

**So, why couples? How does my relationship to my partner fit into the scope of these newsletters?**

**Part of my work as a children's therapist is to examine how relationships between parents play a role in their child and family's presenting problems. Parents are the leaders of the home and serve as models to their children for behavior, emotional expression, coping, etc.**

**When parents are functioning at their best, our children are more likely to be functioning at their best too. Because of that, it's important we consider this pandemic's impact on parenting relationships.**

**This information doesn't just stop at parents though, this extends out to any couple currently navigating relational stressors that have occurred as a result of this pandemic.**

**Why? Because another important aspect to consider is the role our relationships play in providing us with comfort, safety, security, and reassurance during these uncertain times. I've brought up a few times now the importance of connection, and one of the most important connections is with the one we share our life with.**

**My hope is the information discussed below will help your relationships feel closer and more fulfilling during these trying times, and you may even notice that changes in the way you interact with your partner can lead to positive changes in other aspects of your lives.**

## Contact Me

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## Current Couple Dynamics

- **“Who are you and what have you done with...?”**
  - These uncertain times have the power to change us. Stress and anxiety have the power to change our thoughts and behavior. Its likely all of us at some point during this time have acted or felt a little different than usual
  - Our partners can pick up on those changes and sometimes react in ways that are counterproductive to reduce their own feelings of stress and anxiety
  - Current stressors don't stop at our health. It may be difficult at times to conceptualize and communicate our stress to others
- **“We used to be able to talk to each other about our feelings, why is it so hard now?”**
  - Stress and anxiety can also shut down the systems in our minds that support communication and vulnerable emotional expression
  - Rather than direct communication, communication is delivered indirectly as we project our difficult feelings towards smaller, or secondary, issues
    - Doing the dishes, snoring/sleep problems, what to watch on TV, who gets the last scoop of ice cream, spending habits, etc.
- **“It feels like we're arguing more”**
  - Arguments, conflict, and tense conversation are happening in every relationship right now
  - Our partners are often are safe, trusted confidants. When times get tough, we place the emotions that boil over into their hands knowing that they will be there to hold them and to hold us
  - Right now, the difficulty is that our partners' emotions could be close to boiling over too, and they may be relying on us in the same way we rely on them
  - Arguments are often an attempt to navigate this dynamic in hopes of establishing who will hold who and in what moment

## Patterns

- **Two distinct patterns of communication often develop in times of high stress, anxiety, and uncertainty**
- **Escalating**
  - This pattern is defined by the “anything you can do; I can do better” concept
  - Partner A escalates, then partner B escalates, causing partner A to escalate more, causing partner B to escalate more
  - This pattern can lead to arguments becoming louder, more explosive, and more visible to children (when it is between parents) due to its escalating nature
  - You may even find yourselves at this point:



- **Pursue-Withdraw**
  - This pattern is defined by one partner's desire for closeness/communication, while the other partner attempts to remain separated or distant
  - Can often be in response to invalidating communication or fear of being invalidated
  - Similar to escalating patterns, these arguments can become louder and explosive as each partner asserts their desire for closeness or distance (slamming doors, yelling to be heard or to push away, leaving the house, etc)
- **Understanding your pattern with your partner is an important first step toward interrupting the pattern and beginning to work towards healthier and more fulfilling interactions**
- **Pattern awareness can also support your ability to prevent arguments and conflict from bleeding into the lives of your children**

Pro-tip for couples suddenly working from home together: Get yourselves an imaginary coworker to blame things on. In our apartment, Cheryl keeps leaving her dirty water cups all over the place and we really don't know what to do about her.

1:14 PM · 3/16/20 · [Twitter Web App](#)

IT'S OKAY IF YOU FALL APART  
SOMETIMES. TACOS FALL APART,  
AND WE STILL LOVE THEM.



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## Strategies

- **Avoid fantasizing about how things “should” be**
  - It’s very easy to set high expectations when you are quarantined at home with your partner and/or family
  - Expectations need to be communicated clearly and worked through to come to a balanced perspective
- **Structure and schedule your time together**
  - Things can feel weird when you’re working from home and your partner is right next you or in the other room
  - Establish times to break away to be a couple and not coworkers
- **Structure and schedule your time apart**
  - Privacy, independence, and alone time have all but disappeared when confined to the same home
  - Talk with your partner about your tolerance/need for alone time and privacy; its normal and every needs & deserves time to themselves
- **Work through the negative moments, don’t ignore them**
  - Conflict is normal; conflict is growth
  - Show compassion and patience towards each other
    - You’re in this together
    - View your partners frustrating behaviors in the context of the situation they are in and not as an inherent flaw
  - When things get too tense or heated, take breaks
    - Breaks do not mean you are giving up, breaks mean you care about this conversation and want to be at your best for it
    - Breaks also allow partners needed time and space to consider/process information that was shared during the argument
- **Be positive with each other**
  - Show gratitude
    - Set a time during your day to share what you appreciated about your partner from that day, or something about your partner you are thankful for
    - Make this a daily ritual and you may begin noticing the positives about your partner more than the negatives
  - Laugh together
  - Document this time, not as a stressor, but as a valuable memory
    - Journal about your time together
    - Post about your experiences on social media
    - Practice reflection together
    - Scrapbook

- **Have conversations about roles/needs**

- If you have kids, they're home with you too. The hours of 8-4 are a whole different ball game when your office is also where you live and where your kids go to school
- Communicate with each other about your ideas for how you two can be the best team when it comes to caring for your kids:
  - Separate/Assign duties ahead of time
  - Block off time where each of you assumes primary parenting roles
  - Strategize around "rush hours" where your home naturally becomes more busy
- Be clear with each other in what you need from the other
- Be willing to hear what your partner may need from you
- Practice flexibility
  - In times of high stress and anxiety, rigidity often leads to cracks and breaks. When we are flexible, we better able to handle stress

- **Make sure to take care of yourself**

- Eat healthy, exercise, get sleep, practice mindfulness
- When you're at your best, you will be more likely to help your partner be at their best too

## Final thoughts:

**Like I mentioned in the beginning, our interactions as adults serve as a model of what healthy relationships look like for our children.**

**When we engage in healthy communication and model positive relationships, we're not only teaching children how to treat others, but also how to be treated. Holding both standards is important. We want the next generation to be good people, and we also want them to know who good people are.**

**The impact and value of maintaining a positive relationship with your partner/co-parent/roommate/husband/wife/etc. has both short- and long-term benefits for you and your children. Keep that in mind as we continue into these uncertain times.**

**We've been granted time to work on and improve our relationships with one another, lets take advantage of it so that when this is all finally over, we can come back together stronger than ever.**

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