Love & Marriage: the secrets to boosting our health

Emily Shaw, MD          R3 Talk          2.14.2013
By 4:00pm you should...

- know the health benefits of marriage
- understand how to recognize troubled relationships
- know the 7 essential principles to making relationships work
- have a few tools at your fingertips
MARRIAGE: does it REALLY matter?
Married

- LEAST likely to be in fair or poor health (age-adjusted prevalence = 10.5%)
- LEAST likely to be limited in activity because of a health problem (age-adjusted prevalence = 12.2%)
- LEAST likely to have experienced severe psychological distress in past 30 days (age-adjusted prevalence = 2.01%)
- LEAST likely to be a heavy drinker (age-adjusted prevalence = 3.7%)
- MOST likely to be overweight/obese (age-adjusted prevalence in men > 71%!!! and women 49%)
Single & Never Married

* 2nd LOWEST prevalence of fair/poor health, limitations in activity, severe psychological distress

* LEAST likely to be overweight/obese (but still 54%)

* LEAST likely to have low back pain (24.7%)
Partnered

* not the LEAST or even 2nd LEAST likely for anything
* MOST likely to be drinking heavily (8.2% => 2.7x more likely than married)
* MOST likely to be a current smoker (38%)
* for drinking & smoking being an unmarried partner was a better predictor than being poor, Black, Hispanic, or uneducated
* MOST likely to have low back pain (34%)
Divorced/Separated

* 2nd MOST likely to have fair/poor health (17%)
* 2nd MOST likely to have limited activity (23%)
* 2nd MOST likely to have severe psychological distress (5.7%)
* 2nd MOST likely to be physically inactive (43%)
* 2nd MOST likely to be overweight/obese
* 2nd MOST likely to be a current smoker (35%)
* 2nd MOST likely to be a heavy drinker (6.4%)
Widowed (men & women)

* MOST likely to have fair/poor health (20% but relatively worse for younger widows)
* MOST likely to have had serious psychological distress in past 30 days (74%)
* Uneducated widows were the most likely to have had serious psychological distress (11.1% => these are our patients)
* MOST likely to be physically inactive (49%)
* MOST likely to have limited activity (26%)
Relationship Goal?

Do:
- Get/Stay Married
- Stay Single Forever

Don't:
- Get Widowed (try to die first)
- Get Divorced/Separated
So...your patient is in a relationship...
Here Comes TROUBLE!
Signs of TROUBLE

* Harsh Startup
* The 4 Horsemen of the Apocalypse
* Flooding
* Body Language
* Failed Repair Techniques
* Bad Memories
Harsh Startup

- aggressive
- negative
- critical
- sarcastic
- even if voice is soft, the meaning is powerful
The 4 Horsemen

Criticism
Contempt
Defensiveness
Stonewalling
Criticism vs Contempt

http://www.hulu.com/watch/53607
Defensiveness
Stonewalling
Flooding

a tsunami hits and then
drowns victims in
negativity
FIGHT or FLIGHT

Body Language
Failed Repair Techniques
Bad Memories
The End Draws Near...

- Realizing marital problems are severe
- Thinking that working on it together is useless => try to work things out on their own
- Leading parallel lives
- Loneliness
- Not too late for therapy!
That makes me NERVOUS!
Take a few deep breaths...
Belle & Charlie
Gottman's 7 Principles: for making marriage work

* enhance your “love maps”
* nurture your fondness and admiration
* turn toward each other instead of away
* let your partner influence you
* solve your solvable problems
* overcome gridlock
* create shared meaning
The Relevant Research

- predicting divorce among newlyweds from the first three minutes of a marital conflict discussion (Carrere S, Gottman J. Fam Proc 38:293-301, 1999)
Emotional Intelligence: the key to Enhancing your Love Maps
Enhance Your Love Maps: a game

1. Name my two closest friends. (2)
2. What is my favorite musical group, composer, or instrument? (2)
3. What was I wearing when we first met? (2)
4. Name one of my hobbies. (3)
5. Where was I born? (1)
6. What stresses am I facing right now? (4)
7. Describe in detail what I did today, or yesterday? (4)
8. When is my birthday? (1)
9. What is the date of our anniversary? (1)
10. Who is my favorite relative? (2)
11. What is my fondest unrealized dream? (5)
12. What is my favorite flower? (2)
13. What is one of my greatest fears or disaster scenarios? (3)
14. What is my favorite time of day for lovemaking? (3)
15. What makes me feel most competent? (4)
16. What turns me on sexually? (3)
17. What is my favorite meal? (2)
18. What is my favorite way to spend an evening? (2)
19. What is my favorite color? (1)
20. What personal improvements do I want to make in my life? (4)
21. What kind of present would I like best? (2)
22. What was one of my best childhood experiences? (2)
23. What was my favorite vacation? (2)
24. What is one of my favorite ways to be soothed? (4)
25. Who is my greatest source of support (other than you)? (3)
26. What is my favorite sport? (2)
27. What do I most like to do with time off? (2)
28. What is one of my favorite weekend activities? (2)
29. What is my favorite getaway place? (3)
30. What is my favorite movie? (2)
31. What are some of the important events coming up in my life? How do I feel about them? (4)
32. What are some of my favorite ways to work out? (2)
33. Who was my best friend in childhood? (3)
34. What is one of my favorite magazines? (2)
35. Name one of my major rivals or “enemies”. (3)
36. What would I consider my ideal job? (4)
37. What do I fear the most? (4)
38. Who is my least favorite relative? (3)
39. What is my favorite holiday? (2)
40. What kinds of books do I most like to read? (3)
41. What is my favorite TV show? (2)
42. Which side of the bed do I prefer? (2)
43. What am I most sad about? (4)
44. Name one of my concerns or worries. (4)
45. What medical problems do I worry about? (2)
46. What was my most embarrassing moment? (3)
47. What was my worst childhood experience? (3)
48. Name two of the people I most admire. (4)
49. Name my major rival or enemy. (3)
50. Of all the people we both know, who do I like the least? (3)
51. What is one of my favorite desserts? (2)
52. What is my social security number? (2)
53. Name one of my favorite novels. (2)
54. What is my favorite restaurant? (2)
55. What are two of my aspirations, hopes, and wishes? (4)
56. Do I have a secret ambition? What is it? (4)
57. What foods do I hate? (2)
58. What is my favorite animal? (2)
59. What is my favorite song? (2)
60. Which sports team is my favorite? (2)
Nurture Your Fondness & Admiration

* remember the friendship

* "I admire"

* "I appreciate"

* remember the past: how you met, first impressions, decision to marry, highlights, tensions, how you worked them out, things you enjoy doing together

* think about your philosophy of marriage: what has made your relationship work, accomplishments in the relationship that you’re proud of, how your marriage has changed over the years

* where you’d like your marriage to go next

* 1 a day exercise: 7 weeks
Turn Toward Each Other Instead of Away

* Emotional Bank Account
* Stress Reducing Conversations:
  take turns, don’t give unsolicited advice, show genuine interest, empathize, take your partner’s side, we against others mentality, express affection, validate emotions
Let Your Partner Influence You

* Yield to Win
* The Gottman Island Survival

Sunday, February 17, 13
Problem Solving

* Perpetual Problems
* Solvable Problems
* Telling the Difference
* Signs of Gridlock
Solve Your Solvable Problems

- soften the startup: a vignette
- repair techniques: learn to make & receive them
- soothe yourself & each other
- compromise
- faults: be tolerant of each other's
Coping with Typical Solvable Problems

* **Work Stress:** make the relationship “a place of peace”

* **In-Laws:** establish a sense of “we-ness”

* **Money:** balance the freedom it brings with the security it symbolizes

* **Sex:** fundamental appreciation & acceptance of each other

* **Housework:** create a sense of fairness and teamwork

* **A New Baby:** expanding the sense of “we-ness” to include children
Overcoming Gridlock

* become a “Dream Detective”
* identify your absolute must-haves
* identify aspects where you can be more flexible
* compromise
Create Shared Meaning

* easy to confuse with the daily grind
* could be very happy for a while with the first 6 principles
* but something is lacking...what is it?
* shared meaning = rituals, symbols, roles and stories (just like for any culture) that give structure to your relationship
Happy Marriage Tools: a review

- love map game
- remembering fond memories of the past
- stress reducing conversations
- Gottman Island survival game
- solvable problem solving: soften the startup, repair techniques, soothing, compromise, tolerate faults,
- become a dream detective
- create shared meaning
Yay for LOVE!