

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, NORTHRIDGE

AN ONLINE GUIDE FOR RETURNING MARRIAGE AND FAMILY THERAPY
STUDENTS WHO ARE IN A COMMITTED RELATIONSHIP

A graduate project submitted in partial fulfillment of the
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by

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ABSTRACT

AN ONLINE GUIDE FOR RETURNING MARRIAGE AND FAMILY THERAPY STUDENTS WHO ARE IN A COMMITTED RELATIONSHIP

The purpose of this graduate project was to create a guide to help returning students in a committed relationship, as well as their partners, who are starting the Marriage and Family Therapy program at California State University, Northridge. Returning to college after having taken a break for diverse reasons can be both exciting and daunting. Dealing with the demands of classes, homework, a committed relationship and sometimes children can at times become a difficult task. This project helps to ease those difficulties by offering seven basic topics to discuss to help students and their partners plan ahead.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Introduction

Returning to school can be both exciting and stressful for adults, especially in the field of psychotherapy (Sori, Wetchler, Ray, & Niedner, 1996). Indeed, it represents a time of personal challenge as well as growth, where students not only learn new ideas and skills, but also focus on self-awareness (Sori et al., 1996). It has been suggested that participating in graduate training in psychotherapy could have positive effects on married students or students in a committed relationship and their families (Sori et al., 1996). As students increase their self-confidence, their personal relationships improve (Sori et al., 1996).

A rising number of married Americans are registering in colleges and universities all across the United States. However, few studies have examined how this new type of students are dealing with their academics and personal relationships (Meehan & Negy, 2003). Since 1960, a growing number of women over 25 years of age have become students. Many of them are wives and mothers. Meehan and Negy (2003) described that recently researchers have focused on the non-traditional students such as married, in a committed relationship or single parent students and full-time worker or returning for a new career students.

Research on the impact of doctoral programs on committed relationships has increased and as a result, four main areas of potential distress have been identified: financial problems, lifestyle modification, lack of time, and communication issues (Hyun, 2010). Stress is continuously present in the life of graduate students and the long hours

involved in meeting program requirements can have significant effects on their families (Sori et al., 1996). Non-traditional students are constantly confronted with the need to balance their multiple roles, at work, school and in their personal lives (Butler, 2007). Returning to school limits their time, energy and finances (Butler, 2007). As a result, stress becomes a significant variable that can affect adult student's grade point average (GPA), persistence in continuing college and commitment to reaching graduation (Sandler, 2002). The findings in the study by Hyun, Quinn, Madon and Lustig (2006) revealed that half of the graduate students surveyed had suffered stress-related problems that affected their emotional well being as well as their school performance within that past year. Numerous graduate students reported feeling depressed, overwhelmed and at times exhausted (Hyun et al., 2006).

Transitions points in a marriage, such as a spouse returning to college, can lead to a higher risk of divorce (Guldner, 1978). The first year in a psychotherapy graduate program can be especially difficult and graduate students who move on to the second year are far from being guaranteed an easier ride (Sori et al., 1996). The following semesters are more demanding and trainees are often overstretched between program requirements for therapy, supervision hours, and culminating requirement (Sori et al., 1996). Both trainees, as well as their spouses, often complained that the trainee did not have enough energy for their relationship and family (Sori et al., 1996). Many students have reported being physically and emotionally drained by the multiple requirements of their training (Sori et al., 1996). Gerstein and Russell (2000) have labeled graduate school as a major life event that can cause marital dissatisfaction. Factors such as financial adjustments, relocating to a new neighborhood, changes in schedules and

variation in one's social life may have a negative impact on committed relationships and as a result, graduate school is often associated with a greater risk of divorce (Gerstein & Russell, 2000)

Statement of Need

Many returning adult students who have postponed their admission into graduate school are in a committed relationship and have a dependent family (Newbold, Mehta & Forbus, 2010). The obligations of higher education impact family interactions and many couples are faced with a need to revise the division of labor and childcare in the household (Sweet & Moen, 2007). Anxiety is a central factor that can play a crucial role in the success or failure of a student (Tasnimi, 2005). The anxiety and stress of married MFT students could negatively affect their relationships. Kohler and Munz (2006) explained how studies have shown that the utilization of adaptive coping skills can lead to a positive outcome and greater satisfaction. Therefore an online guide will be an effective way to offer support to MFT students in a committed relationship and help them prepare while enrolling in their program.

Purpose of the Graduate Project

The purpose of this project is to consider the connection between marital satisfaction and adaptation to college for students in the field of mental health, and then to formulate an online guide for them. The guide will offer resources and seven easy-to-follow steps that will facilitate the balance between personal and student life for those in a committed relationship who are enrolling in the Marriage and Family Therapy (MFT) program at California State University, Northridge (CSUN). This project will assist with

the understanding of the issues and needs of returning students in committed relationships enrolled in the MFT program, and formulate an online guide to help lead them to success.

Terminology

MFT: Marriage and Family Therapy/Marriage and Family Therapists

Non-Traditional Students: Students over the age of 24 years who are working and did not continue to college directly after high school, and who often have dependents.

Returning Students: Students who have delayed their enrollment in college.

Committed Relationships: Relationships in which the couple is, devoted, loyal, dedicated and faithful, or joined in marriage according to law or custom.

Part-Time Students: Students enrolled in one to six credits during a semester.

Full-Time Students: Students enrolled in more than 6 credits and up to 15 credits during a semester.

Bridge to Literature Review

The following review of literature of chapter two will describe non-traditional students, students in committed relationships and their adaptation to college. The review of literature will also explain the difference of stress and anxiety for full-time students versus part-time students, male and female students, couples in which both mates are enrolled in college and students with children. The following literature review will additionally emphasize the support of the spouse or partner, the importance of the field of study and finally the positive and negative impact that the Marriage and Family Therapy program could have on students in committed relationships.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

Gottman and Silver (1999) claim that what makes a marriage work is remarkably simple: couples who are happily married have found a certain balance between keeping their negative feelings toward each other from overtaking their positive ones. Gottman and Silver (1999) call those marriages emotionally intelligent. The purpose of the literature review is first to identify the different types of non-traditional students, then to determine the impacts of the marriage and family therapy program on those students, and finally to recognize the common conflicts in marriages or committed relationships that can be caused by the program, as well as how to deal with them.

Non-Traditional Students

More Americans are returning to school as adults either to expand their career opportunities or for personal challenge, and many have to overcome barriers such as financial issues, fear, feelings of embarrassment, and challenges in their marriages (Burden, 1995). Burden (1995) and Kasworm (1990) note that the rate of married adults going back to school has increased steadily since World War II. According to Kasworm (2003) 53% of students entering college are married. According to Levine and Cureton (1998) five out of six students enrolled in college are adults with part-time jobs, juggling school, family, and/or work. Gerstein and Russell (1990) explained that students in graduate school face a major life change and that marital issues often arise.

The non-traditional student population, defined as being over 24 years old, working full-time and often having dependents, has increased tremendously between

1996 and 2006 (Newbold, Mehta & Forbus, 2010). Non-traditional students are usually defined as students who have not continued to college directly after high school (Newbold et al., 2010). These non-traditional students are faced with new and different stressors than traditional students (Forbus et al., 2011). They have more external demands such as marriage and children, and consequently more external responsibilities than traditional students (Morris, Brooks, & May, 2003). Non-traditional students face several challenges such as the strains of work, school and personal lives in addition to the conflicts of the different roles they now hold (Giancola, Grawitch, & Borchert, 2009). Therefore, the overload of demands put upon them could bring more restrictions than that of traditional students (Giancola et al., 2009). Because the number of non-traditional students has grown, it is necessary for these students, as well as for universities, to better understand how numerous external demands affect them while attending college (Forbus et al., 2011).

Married Students

Many students who have delayed their enrollment in college are married and often have dependents (Newbold et al., 2010). In returning to college, those students find themselves confronted by new obligations that lead to changes which impact their whole family (Sweet & Moen, 2007). Researchers have found that married undergraduate students have more difficulties adjusting to college than non-married students, mostly due to family responsibilities (Meehan & Negy, 2003). Most couples with a partner in college have to reassign their responsibilities at home, including household chores and childcare (Sweet & Moen, 2007). As a result of the life alterations that are involved in returning to college, Scheinkman (1988) reported a negative impact on marriage for

students in graduate school and described a high rate of divorce in graduate students who were enrolled in a university and also seeking help at its mental health clinic.

Scheinkman (1988) further explained that students experienced difficulty integrating their sometimes-opposing roles as student and spouse.

Spouses of MFT graduate students reported negative impacts on their marital status, mostly due to financial stressors and the diminution of time spent together (Legako & Sorenson, 2000). Dahl et al. (2010) reported the same findings. Guldner (1978) also found that the spouse could sometimes feel angry with the student for developing a sense of independence during graduate studies.

Additionally, spouses may be forced to undermine their personal goals temporarily in order to support the family while graduate students further their education. This may lead to spouses feeling trapped and resentful of the students (Pearlin & Turner 1987). Guy (1987) also believed that graduate students and their spouses grow apart mostly due to their modification in interests, values and opinions. The new autonomy of students and reduced intimacy in couples can lead to isolation and estrangement (Guy, 1987).

Brannock (1996) described several factors that influenced the marital satisfaction of college students such as the age at which the couple was married, the length of the marriage, the level of education of the other spouse, and remarriages. The older people are when they get married, the more chance they have of finding lasting happiness in their relationship (Brannock, 1996). Brannock (1996) explained that maturity in a marriage has a major impact on its longevity. Brannock (1996) also describe that the more education a person has, the greater chances he/she will have to find marital

satisfaction. It is also revealed that students in a young marriage have a higher risk of marital dissatisfaction (Brannock, 1996). Scheinkman (1988) noted that the younger the marriage, the more it was at risk and that couples with children had a higher level of stress. Scheinkman (1988) also recognized that a longer marriage has a constructive impact on the graduate school student.

Meehan and Negy (2003) showed a positive correlation between the overall quality of the marriage prior to enrollment and the adaptation to college. The same findings occurred for students who were not married but involved in a committed relationship (Meehan & Negy, 2003). Studies showed that although a good relationship correlated positively with the adjustment to college, the process of adjusting to college affected the quality of the relationship (Meehan & Negy, 2003). For example, off-campus students in a committed relationship spent less time with their significant other as a result of having to commute to campus and therefore experienced increased stress (Govaerts & Dixon, 1988).

Students with Children

Students with children reported only a slight rise in stress compared to students without children, and the number of children did not seem to make a difference (Ford et al., 1996). Parents in the same study described a stronger feeling of guilt for not spending enough time with their families, and especially with their children (Ford et al., 1996). Other studies showed that the ages of the children affected the parents' ability to adjust to returning to school as well as their marital satisfaction (McRoy & Fisher, 1982). In the research of Sori et al. (1996), the results indicate that many students who are mothers express guilty feelings for not being able to spend much time with their children,

especially if the children are very young. Students who are mothers expressed often being too tired to care for their young children (Sori et al., 1996).

Female Students' Interaction with their Children and the Impacts on Marital Satisfaction

Spouses of students with children reported a higher level of stress than childless spouses. (Ford et al., 1996). Suitor (1987) found that married mothers who returned to school reported negative effects on marital satisfaction, mostly due to their level of involvement in school. Wives and mothers who became full-time students when they entered the university programs were more involved in the academic community, and their role as student took priority over their roles as wife and mother. Consequently, husbands reported a decline of satisfaction in their wives' performance of family roles, which caused a decline in their marital satisfaction (Suitor, 1987). Husbands of full-time students with children became increasingly unhappy in their marriages more so than the students themselves. Suitor (1987) justified those findings by the lack of marital interaction between husband and wife and by the husband's increased participation in household chores and childcare. The tensions in performance of traditional family roles appear when a wife returns to school or enters the work force (Suitor, 1987). McRoy and Fisher (1982) found that the presence of young children in a married couple where one or both of the parents go back to college aggravated the marital satisfaction of the parents.

Part-Time Versus Full-Time Non-Traditional Students

Full-Time Students

A distinction between full-time and part-time students was identified in some research. Suitor (1987) revealed that at the end of their studies, full-time students admitted that they had compromised their performance in their family role consistently

more than part-time students. The quantity and quality of time spent with the family was significantly lower for full-time students than that of part-time students (Suitor, 1987). Therefore, full-time students are more likely than part-time students to experience marriage difficulties (Suitor, 1987). Because full-time students have a greater contact and involvement with the academic community than part-time students, it seems more likely that full-time students would embrace the academic community as a reference group (Suitor, 1987). Over time, full-time students have a stronger tendency than part-time students to increase their interest in educated acquaintances and consequently, lower their interest in less-educated acquaintances, such as family and partners (Suitor, 1987). Therefore, full-time students tend to readjust their priorities and place a stronger emphasis on their student role, while neglecting their family role, especially when conflict arises (Suitor, 1987).

Part-Time Students

Part-time students do not go through a specific change regarding their group of reference, and therefore are more likely to continue with their family and cultural obligation (Suitor, 1987). As a result, husbands of part-time students are more likely to experience only a slight change in their relationship and in their overall marital satisfaction (Suitor, 1987). Therefore, husbands of female part-time students did not alter their amount of support (Suitor, 1987).

Two Students in a Committed Relationship

Research showed that contrary to initial predictions, married couples in which both mates were students did not show a better adjustment to college than couples with only one student (Meehan & Negy, 2003). The strain of dual college-related expenses,

reduced incomes and stress from exams were given as reasons for unhappiness by Meehan and Negy (2003). In contrast, the findings of Brannock, Litten and Smith (2000) showed that couple graduate students had more marital satisfaction than couples where only one person went back to school. However, when the married couple included two students, the income level was lower than couples involving only one student (McRoy & Fisher, 1982). It would seem that in a couple involving two students, both mates are responsible for earning regular wages whereas in a couple involving only one student, the spouse that is not attending school is responsible for earning regular wages (McRoy & Fisher, 1982). Results in the McRoy and Fisher (1982) study also show that when both husbands and wives are students as well as working, their marital adjustment to college attendance was better than when only the wife was the economical provider and the husband the student.

Gender Difference

Male Students

Gender differences in married students showed a significant contrast in adaptation to college (Meehan & Negy, 2003). Males adjust better than females to their new challenge, and this was in part explained because professors seemed to pay more attention to male students (Meehan & Negy, 2003). McRoy and Fisher (1982) found a strong correlation between the wage earner and marital adjustment to college. Couples involving the wife as the main financial supporter experienced more disagreement than those involving the husband as the main financial supporter. However, even a small financial contribution by the husband enhanced marital satisfaction (McRoy & Fisher,

1982). The gender difference was also explained by the fact that males showed more interest in their academic competence than females (Meehan & Negy, 2003).

Female Students

During the last 50 years, the number of female students has significantly increased (Suitor, 1987). Studies indicate that full-time female students endorse their student role over their family role when conflict appears (Suitor, 1987). Graduate female students identified that many family problems were directly caused by their college attendance (Gold, 2006), however, Hyun (2010) reported that female counseling doctoral students used their learning in therapy to find a balance between school and marriage. Female students expressed less sexual satisfaction in their relationships than male students (Meehan & Negy, 2003) and explained that they had to reduce their family duties in order to manage their multiple roles throughout the school year (Suitor, 1987). Suitor (1987) pointed out that female full-time students and their husbands were less satisfied with their spouses' emotional support throughout the years of completing their programs. During the first year, female students revealed a lower level of satisfaction compared with the second year (Suitor, 1987). The lower level of satisfaction reported by married female students during the second year was attributed to the newly unsupportive attitude of their husbands towards their enrollment in college (Suitor, 1987). As a result, the wives reported feeling disappointed by their husbands' lack of support, especially for their long-term goals (Suitor, 1987). Full-time married female students even reported having considered a separation or a divorce during the first nine months of the program, 17.4% at the beginning of the year, and 52.2% at the end of the year (Suitor,

1987). Brannock (1996) found no significant differences in marital satisfaction for female graduate students during their studies compared to men.

Sori et al (1996) reported that gender role expectations of female graduate students in traditional marriages greatly influenced their returning to school experience. Indeed, male spouses often got angry with the students for suddenly developing a more independent attitude as a consequence of the graduate training in marriage and family therapy (Guldner, 1978). Male spouses view the MFT program as less enhancing and experience a greater amount of stress than female spouses because they were not socialized to put their wives' professional needs above their own (Ford et al., 1996). Male spouses did not accommodate well to their new more subordinate and supportive role in their marriages. (Ford et al., 1996). Subsequently, unsuccessfully resolving the issue of role expectations may negatively impact the therapeutic effort of the female trainee (Sori et al., 1996).

The Support of the Spouse

The support and encouragement that married students received from their spouse helped them to adjust both socially and emotionally, as well as commit to their studies (Meehan & Negy, 2003). Katz, Monnier, Libet, Shaw, and Beach (2000) found that the spouse's support was an impactful contributor to emotional and marital adjustment for medical students. Indeed, the spouse's support, and especially empathy, acted as buffer against stress related issues (Katz, et al., 2000). Additionally, Norton, Thomas, Morgan, Tilley and Dickins (1998) noted a decrease of spousal support throughout the medical student training, which could be explained by the burden of more responsibilities for the nonstudent spouse. Even if the couple shared the initial decision for one of them to

attend college, the nonstudent became resentful over time (Norton, et a., 1998). Kirby, Biever, Martinez, and Gomez (2004) emphasized the need of potential students who are married to share their plan with their spouse and family prior to enrolling in college and highlighted the importance of working together in planning the details of one of them returning to school. If the spouse of the returning student was not part of the decision, a negative outcome could occur (Kirby et al., 2004).

The Impacts of the MFT Program on Committed Relationships

Positive Impacts of the Marriage and Family Therapy Program Committed Relationships

Studying psychology played an important role in the outcome of the marital satisfaction of returning students (Legako & Sorenson, 2000). For example, Legako and Sorenson (2000) found that psychology-based students described a greater emotional expressiveness in their relationship that directly resulted from their training. Married students who enrolled in an MFT program hope to learn more about how to handle family issues and are looking for techniques to improve marital satisfaction more than non-married MFT students (Hertlein & Lambert-Shute, 2007). Stephen, Duncan and Goddard (1993) reported that family professionals and their spouses provided evidence of field-related enhancers due to family therapy training, such as greater communication skills, better appreciation of personal and marital strengths, an increase in sensitivity to each other's needs and a greater acceptance of one's own part in family or marital problems.

According to Sori, Wetchler, Ray, and Niedner (1996) and Hawley, Blume, and Smiley (2006) married students enrolled in a couple, marriage and family counseling programs benefited from their studies and their partners reported a direct impact of the curriculum on their marriage. Farber (1983) and Guy (1987) described an insight into

human behavior felt by marriage and family therapy students and their spouses that many times guided them towards an increase in self-awareness. In one study, results showed that being in a MFT graduate program was more enhancing than stressful for both the student and their spouses (Sori, Wetchler, Ray & Niedner, 1996). The most prominent finding of a survey conducted at Purdue University was that students in an MFT graduate program and their spouses expressed improvement in coping with stressful experiences as a couple (Polson, 1989). Therefore, this study seemed to show that the focus on marriage and family life obtained by students in MFT training programs had helped students resolve their marital problems better than students in other graduate programs (Polson, 1989).

Negative Impacts of the Marriage and Family Therapy Program on Committed Relationships

Nevertheless, Schwartz (1988) explained that family therapy clinical training has shifted from educating young therapists to transforming them. It is reported that the professional's family training may bring an imbalance in power to the family dynamic by establishing an "expert" position in family disagreements (Stephen, Duncan & Goddard, 1993). It then becomes the family members' decision to acknowledge this power and to use it appropriately (Stephen, Duncan & Goddard, 1993).

Ford et al. (1996) explained that married students enrolled in marriage and family therapy (MFT) programs expressed increase feelings of stress, especially during the second year. Students become pressured into completing their program requirements. Some marriages may suffer from the demands of the MFT training which can lead to

dissatisfaction in the relationship, and as marital satisfaction decreases, the risk of divorce increases (Polson, Michol, Nida & Robert, 1998).

Sometimes couples simply grow apart due to a change in values, interests, and reduced intimacy (Guy, 1987). Guldner (1987) described how students in MFT programs are faced with their own relationship problems and how students in those positions had too little time and energy to address them. Ford et al. (1996) reported that the highest-ranked stressor for couples with a student in a MFT program was not having enough time for their spouses. The second-highest stressor for students and their spouses was the lack of energy for their own marriage and families. Many students described an emotional and physical overtiredness due to their extreme workload, constant demands from supervisors and internship requirements (Ford et al., 1996). The third-ranked stressor was the discrepancy of personal development between students and their spouse (Ford et al., 1996). Undeniably the personal growth for students may have brought a threat to spouses left behind. However, Dahl, Jensen and McCampbell (2010) found that contrary to past studies, only two spouses in their study felt neglected by their MFT trainee partner and left behind regarding their intellectual and personal growth.

Thesis and dissertation requirements brought the most stress to students and their families, especially because of the fear of failure during the last year of their studies (Ford et al., 1996). Another survey was dedicated to studying MFT students in which the sample was mainly comprised of Caucasian women in their thirties and forties who were married and had at least one child (Polson, Michol, Nida, & Robert, 1998). These students seem to be more at risk for becoming distressed because of program and family

demands (Polson, Michol, Nida, & Robert, 1998). However, only a small minority would report being distressed or depressed (Polson, Michol, Nida, & Robert, 1998).

The Importance of Romantic Relationships on Adult Attachment

According to Johnson (2008) romantic relationships have become the dominant emotional relationship in modern people's lives, mostly due to the lack of family, close friends and community support. For this reason, love has become the most compelling coping mechanism for human beings (Johnson, 2008). It is necessary for each of us to build an emotional attachment with an irreplaceable other to stay physically and mentally healthy (Whiffen, 2003).

Emotional Focused Therapy for Couples

Dr. Sue Johnson developed Emotional Focused Therapy (EFT). The purpose of this new couple therapy technique was designed to help couples strengthen their emotional bonds or attachments by making them attuned and responsive to each other (Johnson, 2008). Studies conducted during the last fifteen years have showed that 70 to 75 percent of couples who applied EFT were able to improve their declining marriages and turn them into happy and long lasting relationships (Johnson, 2008). The American Psychological Association has recognized EFT as an empirically documented new form of couples therapy (Johnson, 2008).

Attachment Theory

A secure emotional connection, an attachment to another human being, is one of the most basic human needs (Whiffen, 2003). The fear of losing this connection provides widespread drama witnessed by couple and family therapists every day (Whiffen, 2003).

Turning to others for emotional support can be difficult when couples face challenges (Johnson, 2008).

According to Whiffen (2003), the ten principals of attachment are as follows:

a) Attachment is an innate motivating force, b) secure dependence complements autonomy, c) attachment offers a safe haven, d) attachment offers a secure base, e) accessibility and responsiveness build bonds, f) fear and uncertainty activate attachment needs, g) the process of separation distress is predictable, h) a finite number of insecure forms of engagement can be identified, i) attachment involves working models of self and other, j) and isolation and loss are inherently traumatizing.

Different Style of Attachment in Romantic Relationships

Securely attached adults have low anxiety and low avoidance, and therefore are able to have long, steady and fulfilling relationships (Whiffen, 2003). On the other hand, insecurely attached people are confronted with high anxiety and/or avoidance (Whiffen, 2003). They become highly preoccupied with their partners and often experience low satisfaction in their relationships (Whiffen, 2003). Insecurely attached adults are also confronted with a high rate of break-ups due to their obsessive-dependent style (Whiffen, 2003).

Distress in a Relationship

Conflicts in relationships are influenced by attachment styles (Whiffen, 2003). A couple of two insecurely attached and anxious adults will function poorly, whereas as couple with one secure partner will encourage and help the insecure partner to alter its maladaptive behaviors (Whiffen, 2003). Indeed, a secure partner may become a buffer to

the negative effects of the insecurity that his/her partner is experiencing or expressing (Whiffen, 2003).

Divorce statistics are terrible and the reason marriages end is because spouses do not realize what they have until it is too late (Gottman, 1999). The chances of getting divorced are so high that it could be helpful for couples, even those satisfied in their relationships, to put more efforts into keeping their marriage strong (Gottman, 1999). People who are happily married live longer and happier lives than divorced people (Gottman, 1999). Therefore saving a marriage is important for the whole family (Gottman, 1999). After years of research, John M. Gottman, Ph.D, a relationship expert, offers a practical guide with seven principles to make a marriage work.

Seven Principles to Make a Marriage Work

According to Gottman (1999), making a marriage work is pretty simple, at least in theory. It implies having an emotionally intelligent marriage, by keeping negative thoughts and feelings from overpowering positives ones. To do so, Gottman (1999) lists seven principles to follow.

1. Couples must enhance their “love maps” by being intimately familiar with relevant information about the life of their partners (Gottman, 1999).

Information such as their partners best friend’s name, favorite movies and relatives they like the least (Gottman, 1999). But it also entails information about their partners’ hopes and aspirations, their current stresses and childhood history (Gottman, 1999).

2. Couples must also nurture their fondness and admiration for each other as well as:

3. Turn towards each other instead of away during conflict (Gottman, 1999). This can be achieved by simply reminding oneself of the partner's qualities (Gottman, 1999). Meditating on the partner can help cherish him/her more, as well as discussing positive aspects of the partner and the relationship can strengthen it (Gottman, 1999). Doing "a stress-reducing conversation" and talking briefly about anything going on in the partners' life not related to the marriage is a helpful exercise as well (Gottman, 1999). Doing so using techniques such as active listening, empathy and non-judgment can be extremely beneficial (Gottman, 1999).
4. Couples need to let each partner influence the other (Gottman, 1999). This does not mean to never express negative emotions towards each other, but to build a firm foundation for compromise (Gottman, 1999).
5. Couples need to solve their solvable problems by learning new approaches to settling conflicts (Gottman, 1999). This can be attained by softening the start up of a disagreement such as expressing complaint but not blame and making "I" statements instead of "you" statements (Gottman, 1999). This can also be accomplished by describing what is happening without evaluating or judging and always being clear, polite, and appreciative (Gottman, 1999).
6. Finally, couples must overcome gridlock by moving it towards dialogue instead (Gottman, 1999). That means talking about gridlock issues without hurting each other's feelings and learning to live with the problem (Gottman, 1999).
7. Couples must also create shared meaning by creating a spiritual inner life (Gottman, 1999). A culture rich life together is created with symbols, rituals and

a deep appreciation for each other's roles and goals (Gottman, 1999). Marriages filled with shared meanings are deeper and more rewarding (Gottman, 1999).

Assessing the Quality of Committed Relationships

The Dyadic Adjustment Scale

The Dyadic Adjustment (DAS) scale represents a commonly used 32-item scale that evaluates the relationship of married couples or unmarried cohabitating couples (Spanier, 1976). The DAS was designed to measure marital adjustment and to complete different functions (Prouty, Markowski, & Barnes, 2000). The DAS continues to be a popular assessment instrument in order to evaluate the adjustment of couples (Prouty, Markowski, & Barnes, 2000). The format of the scale has a range of 0-151 and allocates for easy scoring, and can be completed in a very short period of time due to its length of only two pages (Spanier, 2007).

Synthesis of Literature Review

The purpose of this chapter was to review the literature related to the topic on the common conflicts in marriages or committed relationships that can be caused by returning students, as well as how to deal with them. The literature recognizes that being in a committed relationship and returning to college can have distressing impacts on a student's personal life as well as on his/her partner and family. Therefore, the purpose of this project is to guide returning students to the MFT program at CSUN and their partners by evaluating and resolving situations before conflicts arise.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODS

Introduction

As a returning, married Marriage and Family Therapy student, I had noticed a lot of distress among my married peers and myself, mostly due to the multiple demands of the program, family and married life. I was mostly excited and looking forward to expanding my education, totally unaware of the impact it would have on my personal life. Therefore, this online guide is intended to better prepare and provide support for any returning married students enrolling in the MFT program at California State University, Northridge.

Development of Project

This online guide was developed using professional literature on the subjects of the marital satisfaction of college students as well as review of couple therapy approaches and principles.

The project's purpose is to educate students in a committed relationship about the most frequent difficulties they would encounter as enrolled in the MFT program. Towards this aim, the guide provides seven questions for students to discuss with their partners in order to make their committed relationship work as returning students. Finally, the guide offers suggestion and basic intervention techniques based on the literature.

Intended Audience

The specific intended audience for this graduate project is returning partnered marriage and family therapy students enrolling in the program at California State University, Northridge. Students will be able to use this online guide in order to prepare themselves for the different issues they could encounter in juggling their personal and family lives while completing their curriculum. MFT students in other universities could benefit from this online guide as well. It is also important for potential or current returning MFT students in committed relationships to learn about the counseling center on campus and how they can use it to their advantage as well as reach out to professionals and get involved in their own therapy.

Personal Qualifications

This online guide can be used by married students currently enrolled in the MFT program at CSUN or by prospective students. No qualifications are required other than the student must be married or in a committed relationship.

Environment and Equipment

The online guide for returning, partnered marriage and family therapy students will be available on the California State University, Northridge Website, and will be accessible in the section related to Marriage and Family Therapy. A quiet environment is recommended when accessing the website, but students can choose to access it whenever they want and wherever they are.

Project Outline

The online guide for returning, marriage and family therapy students who are in a committed relationship describes seven topics to discuss for making a committed relationship work as a returning student in the MFT program at CSUN.

1. How will we divide and manage financial responsibilities?
2. Who will work and how much?
3. How will we divide the household tasks?
4. How will we divide childcare if we have children?
5. How much time will we spend together as a couple?
6. How will we talk to the children about our new schedule?
7. How will we keep the love alive in our relationship?

The online guide also provides the Dyadic Adjustment scale and how to take the test. Finally the online guide offers guidance and reading material in the case a relationship obtains a relationally distressed result.

CHAPTER FOUR

EVALUATION

Summary of Project

The purpose of this graduate project was to create a guide to help returning students in a committed relationship, as well as their partners, who are starting the Marriage and Family Therapy program at California State University, Northridge. Returning to college after having taken a break can be both exciting and daunting. Dealing with the demands of classes, homework, a committed relationship and sometimes children can at times become a difficult task. This project helps to ease those difficulties by offering seven basic topics to discuss to help students and their partners plan ahead.

Summary of Evaluation Results

In order to evaluate the project, a group of four students in committed relationships and currently finishing their last semester of the MFT program at CSUN were asked to review the online guide. In addition to the online guide, the students were given an evaluation form (Appendix B) that included questions about the material they had just read.

The evaluation showed that the students were aware of being highly unprepared entering the program regarding dealing with the stress and demands of the program as well as evaluating and discussing the effects it could have in their relationships. All of the students reported having gone through many conflicts with their partners mostly due to their lack of time spent together, money issues and childcare issues. All of the students acknowledged that including their partners into evaluating and discussing the seven

topics of the guide at the beginning of the program would have been beneficial to their relationships. In addition, the four students realized the importance of involving their partners from the beginning, and explaining the program requirements clearly in order to avoid resentments in the future. One student expressed that the guide missed to relate how difficult, time consuming and stressful finding a traineeship was.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

Summary

The purpose of this graduate project was to create a guide to help returning students in a committed relationship, as well as their partners, who are starting the Marriage and Family Therapy program at California State University, Northridge. Returning to college after having taken a break can be both exciting and daunting. Dealing with the demands of classes, homework, a committed relationship and sometimes children can at times become a difficult task. This project helps to ease those difficulties by offering seven basic topics to discuss to help students and their partners plan ahead.

Literature on the subject recognizes that more Americans are returning to school as adults either to expand their career opportunities or for personal challenges. Many have to overcome barriers such as financial issues, fear, feelings of embarrassment, and challenges in their marriages (Burden, 1995). Burden (1995) and Kasworm (1990) report that the rate of married adults going back to school has increased steadily since World War II. According to Kasworm (2003) 53% of students entering college are married. According to Levine and Cureton (1998) five out of six students enrolled in college are adults with part-time jobs, juggling school, family, and/or work.

The support of the spouse, or partner, plays an important role in the social and emotional adjustment of the non-traditional student to their studies (Meehan & Negy, 2003). Katz et al. (2000) reveal that the spouse's support and empathy acts as a buffer against the stress of the student. However, a decline of support from the student's partner

often decreases over time due to the burden of having to juggle more responsibilities at home, even if the partner was part of the initial decision (Norton et al., 1998).

The impacts of the MFT Program on committed relationships could be positive as well as negative. For example, Legako and Sorenson (2000) explained that students studying psychology reported a greater emotional expressiveness in their committed relationships, which they acknowledged as a direct result of their training. Additionally, according to Sori et al., (1996) and Hawley et al., (2006) married students enrolled in a MFT program directly expressed that their marriages benefited from their studies.

Family therapy training may also bring a certain imbalance of power to a committed relationship, as the student tends to become the “expert” when conflicts arise. This power must be used appropriately in order to ease the tensions (Stephen et al., 1993). MFT students also reported lacking both time and energy to spend with their significant others (Ford et al., 1996). The emotional and physical demands of the workload and internship requirements leave students overtired (Ford et al., 1996). It is also important to consider that the personal growth the MFT student experiences as a result of attending the program may be threatening to their partners, who can feel left behind (Ford et al., 1996).

Because romantic relationships have become a predominant emotional relationship in our modern world, romantic love is now the most important coping mechanism for many humans (Johnson, 2008). It is therefore necessary to build a strong emotional attachment with a significant other in order to stay physically and mentally healthy, and survive our daily conflicts (Whiffen, 2003). Turning to others for emotional support is a sign of strength (Johnson, 2008).

It is also important to get familiar with the ten principles of attachment theory. Students and their significant others must be aware that, according to Whiffen (2003), attachment is an innate motivating force; secure dependence complements autonomy; attachment offers a safe haven; attachment offers a secure base; accessibility and responsiveness build bonds; fear and uncertainty activate attachment needs; the process of separation distress is predictable; a finite number of insecure forms of engagement can be identified; attachment involves working models of self and other; and isolation and loss are inherently traumatizing.

In order to strengthen emotional bonds, couples could use the Emotional Focused Therapy (EFT) developed by Dr. Sue Johnson. This new relationship technique has helped up to 75 percent of couples improve their declining marriages by making the participants more attuned and responsive to each other (Johnson, 2008). The American Psychological Association has recognized EFT as an empirically documented new form of couples therapy (Johnson, 2008).

Recommendation for Implementation

This project can be used by partnered students in the MFT program at CSUN, as well as by their partners, in order to first evaluate their preparedness for going through the demands of the program, and then for working together to find solutions to the new strains that returning to school can produce. Prior to attending the program, reviewing the Seven Principles for Making a Committed Relationship Work as a Returning Student in the Marriage and Family Therapy Program at CSUN can help guide couples toward maintaining a healthy and happy relationship. If couples have the desire to assess the quality of their relationship, the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS) is provided in the

project. The DAS represents a 32-items scale that evaluates the relationship of couples in a committed relationship (Spanier, 1976) and it was designed to measure marital adjustment (Prouty et al., 2000). It is only two pages in length and the scoring is easy so it can be completed in a very short period of time (Spanier, 2007).

Recommendations for Future Research

It is hoped that this project and the information it brings would be useful to the student as well as the MFT training program. Indeed, future research could help design specific supportive services for MFT students as well as for their partners, including some activities that would perhaps connect them better to the program (Ford et al., 1996). Counselors and supervisors could be trained to be more sensitive to the implications of stress that the program has on students and therefore on their family and relationships and vice-versa (Ford et al., 1996).

Also research directly related to divorce or break ups among non-traditional graduate students should be explored in order to better understand the need of counseling necessary for such students and their families (Galvin, 2006). Because the number of non-traditional students is growing, it is important to better understand how the impacts of a college education affect marriage and committed relationships (Galvin, 2006). Doing so would provide preventive and more targeted counseling services (Galvin, 2006). Due to the rise in the number of non-traditional students who are either married, in a relationship or may have children and who are confronted by different developmental stages in their family lives, an increase in research attention is necessary (Galvin, 2006).

More research should also be dedicated to help the partners of the returning students. For example, husbands usually feel excluded from the process and especially

from the orientation process (Sutor, 1987). Universities could consider developing orientation sessions dedicated to couples, where both partners would share their concerns and discuss how they might be able to ease this transition event into their lives (Sutor, 1987). Universities may alleviate conflicts in couples by integrating the non-student partner into activities such as orientations and various university events. Childcare might be provided on campus to ease the burden of students who are parents (Giancola et al., 2009).

Counselors and therapists on campus might benefit from a special training on working with returning non-traditional students and their partners (Sutor, 1987). This training could consider the impacts of being a full-time student on a relationship and family responsibilities (Sutor, 1987). Support group formations for students in a relationship and their partners could address concerns that would be beneficial for each party (Brannock et al., 2000).

Finally, universities and college campuses could sponsor weekends involving enrichment experiences for graduate students and their partners that would help them assess their strengths and weaknesses within their relationships and guide them toward improvement (Brannock et al., 2000).

Conclusion

After reading many articles about students in a committed relationship returning to school, and from having gone through that experience myself, it became clear to me that such a guide would be useful and valuable for students and their partners. With the feedback I received from my peers and from listening to their relationship struggles during the two and a half years of the program, I have become increasingly aware of the

lack of preparation for the relational impact of being in a MFT program. I chose to create a project that would help future students entering the MFT program at CSUN and their partners, to evaluate and discuss the potential problems they might encounter, as well as offering students tools to deal with these problems. From my experience, it seemed that neither students nor their partners are fully aware of what they are embarking upon. As time went by, for many, the stress and unhappiness sunk in, only leaving room for resentment and conflicts. I am hopeful that this guide would be helpful and I wish such a guide had been provided to me when I started the program. Reading the books of Dr. Sue Johnson, Dr. John Gottman and Dr. Valerie Whiffen were eye-opening. Therefore I highly recommend these books in the project and made sure to list them. I am also hopeful that the Dyadic Scale would help prepare students and their partners to evaluate and discuss the status of their relationship before entering the program, helping them to honestly open up to each other about their hopes and fears.

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APPENDIX A

Seven Conversations with your Partner:

Making Your Committed Relationship Work as a Returning Student in the Marriage and Family Therapy Program at CSUN

In order to make your committed relationship and family life work as a returning student in the marriage and family therapy program, it is best to be prepared and to evaluate several aspects of your, your partner's, and children's lives that will be altered through this experience. A graduate of the program, Nathalie May, researched the topic and developed the following set of seven conversations that may help you and your partner and/or family better prepare for the demands of this professional graduate program.

The purpose of the seven conversations is to educate students in a committed relationship with or without children on the most common difficulties couples encounter when enrolled in the MFT program at CSUN. Towards this aim, the guide provides seven topics for students to discuss with their partners in order to make their committed relationship and family life work as returning students. Research indicates that transitions points in a marriage, such as a spouse returning to college, can lead to a higher risk of divorce (Guldner, 1978). The first year in a psychotherapy graduate program can be especially difficult and graduate students who move on to the second year are far from being guaranteed an easier ride (Sori et al., 1996). Therefore, the seven conversations are intended to guide students and their partners and help them prepare for the potential issues they may encounter during the program.

Seven Conversations to Have with Your Partner as You Begin the Program

You and your partner- and even your children- have a lot to discuss before you begin the MFT program at CSUN. Here you will find a structured guide addressing seven of the most common area of concern to best prepare you, your partner, and children for the demands of graduate school.

The seven conversation topics are as follows:

1. Finances: How will we divide and manage financial responsibilities?
2. Employment: Who will work and how much?
3. Division of Household Tasks: How will we divide the household tasks?
4. Couple time: How much time and what type of time will we spend together as a couple?
5. Love and Relationship: How will we keep the love alive in our relationship?
6. Childcare: How will we divide childcare if we have children?

And for those with children:

7. Childcare: How will we divide childcare if we have children?

Topic #1: Discuss Financial Issues with your Partner

Money is among the top reasons couples argue in general. Financial issues should be planned before starting the program with your partner. Sit-down, choose a quiet and calm moment to discuss it. Be open, honest and ready to agree or disagree at times. Honesty is the key to building trust in a relationship. Partners should disclose their income, debt, investments, and bank statements to one another. This way, couples know

where they stand. They should be able to use this information as a starting point for determining how to move forward with their finances.

The Estimated Cost of the MFT program at CSUN for the Year 2012-2013:

Graduate/Post Baccalaureate

Living with a Partner: The First Year:

Common Expenses	Estimated Per Semester Cost	Estimated Full Year
*University Fees (may increase up to 10% per year)	\$3,885	\$7,770
Books and Supplies	\$500±	\$1,000
Loan Fees	\$75	\$150
10 Personal Psychotherapy Sessions (first year only: may use insurance or low fee therapists)	\$200-1,200	\$400
1 Workshop per Semester	\$75-125	\$200
Professional Liability Insurance (beginning with fieldwork in second or third semester)	\$75±	\$75
Total	\$4810±	\$9595±

Living with a Partner: The Second and Third Year:

Common Expenses	Estimated Per Semester Cost	Estimated Full Year
*University Fees (may increase up to 10% per year)	\$3,885	\$7,770
Books and Supplies	\$500±	\$1,000
Loan Fees	\$75	\$150
1 Workshop per Semester	\$75-125	\$200
Professional Liability Insurance (beginning with fieldwork in second or third semester)	\$75 ±	\$75

Internship Monthly Fee (if any; second year only)	\$0-375	\$900
Graduation Fee (last semester only)	\$47	\$47
Total	\$4657±	\$10142±

*California State University makes every effort to keep student costs to a minimum.

However fees may increase at any time and without notice due to lack of funding.

Typically the increase is between 3% and 10% per year. All California State University listed fees should be regarded as estimates that are subject to change upon approval by The Board of Trustees.

Questions to Discuss:

- How will you pay for this?
- Who will work and how much?
- Do we qualify for university grant?

Things to Consider:

- Evaluate and discuss the status of finances together
- Evaluate and discuss how to save
- Share spending habits
- Track your spending
- Designate a bill payer
- Set a spending threshold
- Evaluate and discuss having to pay for supervision in traineeship
- Set financial goals
- Discuss your savings if you have any

- Apply for a student loan by logging to:
http://www.csun.edu/financialaid/basics/affects_satisfactory.php
- Apply for a grant to university for tuition adjustment by logging to:
<http://www.csun.edu/grip/research/gap/>
- Work

Topic #2: Discuss reducing your hours at work or not working at all with your partner

The First Year:

The first year in a psychotherapy graduate program can be especially difficult and graduate students who move on to the second year are far from being guaranteed an easier ride (Sori et al., 1996).

The first year consists of two evenings of two classes as part of a cohort. Classes are held at 4:00pm and 7:00pm. Students will be placed in a:

- Monday and Wednesday cohort, or
- Tuesday and Thursday cohort

Because classes are held in the evening, students could work part-time during the day or in the evenings not attending school.

But remember that as a student you must also:

- Meet with your mentor one hour per week
- Schedule time to record regularly therapy-sessions with a peer from your practicum both first and second semester, usually before classes start.

- Meet with classmates for group projects and presentations, usually before classes start or on weekends
- Schedule time for library research
- Attend mandatory weekend workshops and advising sessions
- 20 to 30 hours of homework each week and 40 hours in the last few weeks of each semester
- Minimum of 10 hours of personal psychotherapy
- Visit mental health sites
- Find fieldwork site for the second year

The Second and Third Year

The following semesters are more demanding and trainees are often overstretched between program requirements for therapy, supervision hours, and culminating requirement (Sori et al., 1996).

Students will stay in the same cohort as the first year and the classes will generally be held at the same time.

In Addition During the Second Year

- Traineeships usually require 15 to 25 hours per week
- Trainees are often not paid
- Traineeship may require monthly payment from the trainee for supervision (approximately \$100 per month)
- The second semester of the second year students must start working on their choice of Culminating Experience (5 to 10 hours per week)

Consideration for the Second Year

- Reducing hours at work
- Stop working

The out-of-class commitments are numerous during the first year and keep on accumulating during the second year. Therefore discuss with you partner:

- When will you reduce your hours at work or when will you stop working?
- When will you spend quality time with your partner?
- When will you spend quality time with your children?
- When will study and do your homework?
- Where will you study and do your homework?
- Will your partners accept having your group meetings for presentations at your house?

Topic #3: Discuss the Division of Household Chores:

Most couples with a partner in college have to reassign their responsibilities at home, including household chores and childcare (Sweet & Moen, 2007). As a result of the life alterations that are involved in returning to college, Scheinkman (1988) reported a negative impact on marriage for students in graduate school and described a high rate of divorce in graduate students who were enrolled in a university and also seeking help at its mental health clinic. Scheinkman (1988) further explained that students experienced difficulty integrating their sometimes-opposing roles as student and spouse.

Therefore, couples should make and discuss a detailed list of household chores with duties distributed between partners. Once again partners should sit-down and discuss it calmly and honestly.

The list could be detailed as follow:

Common Daily Household Chores:

- Make beds
- Tidy up the house
- Wash the dishes
- Clean up counters in the kitchen and in the bathroom(s)
- Take out the trash
- Make breakfast
- Make dinner
- Prepare lunchboxes if you have kids and adults meals in advance to take on the go or to freeze.
- Update the shopping list
- Pick up and sort out the mail
- Water the plants
- Feed the pet(s)
- Check pet water bowl
- Walk the dog (if any)
- Pick up children (if any)
- Take children to after school activities

Weekly Household Chores

- Vacuum Carpet
- Wash down floors
- Change beddings and towels
- Dust
- Write a meal plan for the week ahead
- Do the grocery shopping and other errands
 - Consider doing some online and use sites such as Amazon
- Do the laundry
- Pick up dry cleaning
 - consider having it delivered
- Do the ironing
- Clean toilet(s), sink(s) and bathtub(s)

Monthly Household Chores:

- Clean up and re-pack fridge
- Maintain car(s)

Yearly Household Chores:

- Book car(s) for service
- Schedule medical check-ups
- Review and renew insurance policies
- Have pet(s) immunized

Topic #4: Discuss Childcare Issues:

Students and their partners should discuss childcare while they are at work or at school

Childcare can be provided by:

- Family members
- Friends
- Neighbors
- Childcare professionals
- After school programs
- Child Care Resource Center such as: www.ccrcla.org/
- The Associated Student Children Center at CSUN is located at 18343

Plummer St., next to parking Lot B6. For more information go to:

<http://www.csunas.org/childrens-center/>

Childcare issues are one of the most stressful issues for parents attending the MFT

program at CSUN. Therefore, students and their partners need to discuss and plan ahead:

- Who will take care of the children if you work part-time?
- Who will take care of the children when you are at school?
- Who will take care of the children when you are studying?
- What will you tell your children when you are less available?
- How will you partner handle taking care of the children more often?

Topic #5: Discuss how much time you plan on spending with your partner

As a couple you will have less time to spend together than you realize. Both students, as well as their partners, often complain that the student did not have enough energy for their relationship and family (Sori et al., 1996). Many students have reported being physically and emotionally drained by the multiple requirements of their training (Sori et al., 1996). Gerstein and Russell (2000) have labeled graduate school as a major life event that can cause marital dissatisfaction.

Managing time between school and your partner:

- Students will be in school two evenings a week from 4:00pm to 9:45pm or from 1:00pm to 6:45pm
- Keep in mind that one hour in class represents five hours of studies outside of class
- Student will have an approximation of 20 to 40 hours of homework per week
- Student must meet with a mentor one hour per week during the first year
- Students must schedule time to record 4 therapy-sessions with a schoolmate from your practicum per semester during the first year
- Students must meet with classmates for group projects
- Students must schedule time for library research
- Students must attend mandatory weekend workshops
- Students must plan driving time

As an MFT Student, remember to:

- NOT include your partner in your research

- NOT test your new learned techniques on you partner
- Do talk about your learning only if your partner asks

Therefore, discuss your availability as well as your partner's availability in order to plan to weekly connect and spend quality time together. Ask yourself:

- When might we eat lunch together?
- When might we eat dinner together?
- When might we walk together?
- When might we go shopping together?
- When might we make time for sex?
- When might we have a daily conversation?
- When might we go to the movies together?
- Remember that:
 - ➔ Secure dependence complements autonomy
 - ➔ There is no such thing as total independence from others
 - ➔ Secure dependence promotes self-confidence and autonomy
 - ➔ Attachment offers a safe haven
 - ➔ The presence of spouses, lovers, parents and children offers security and comfort while the perceived inaccessibility of such figures provide distress
 - ➔ Proximity to a loved one tranquilizes the nervous system

Topic #6: Talking to Your Children about your Change of Schedule

Parents in a study described a stronger feeling of guilt for not spending enough time with their families, and especially with their children (Ford et al., 1996). Other studies showed that the ages of the children affected the parents' ability to adjust to returning to school as well as their marital satisfaction (McRoy & Fisher, 1982). In the research of Sori et al. (1996), the results indicate that many mother students express guilty feelings for not being able to spend much time with their children, especially if they are very young. Students who are mothers expressed being often too tired to care for their young children (Sori et al., 1996). Becoming an MFT student entails changes in your home schedule and therefore impacts your children.

Suggestions for talking to you children:

- Talk to your children when they are calm, quiet and not tired
- Use simple language
- Be honest and explain the changes to come in the family schedule
- Come up with a plan to spend daily and weekly times with your children and keep your commitment
- Listen carefully for your children's concerns
- Come up with fun and special games/rituals you could do with your children
- Come up with fun and special events/rituals that you could go to with your children
- Agree to talk on the phone and connect every day with your children
- Ask you children for fun things they would like to do with you

Topic #7: Keep the Love Alive:

According to Dr. Sue Johnson, romantic relationships have become the dominant emotional relationship in modern people's lives, mostly due to the lack of family, close friends and community support. For this reason, love has become the most compelling coping mechanism for human beings. It is necessary for each of us to build an emotional attachment with an irreplaceable other in order to stay physically and mentally healthy, in order to survive.

Discuss how to keep the love alive:

- Use your mandatory personal therapy requirement in the first year for couples therapy
- Rejoice the positive moments
- Plan rituals around daily separation and reunion
- Review and reflect on where you slide into insecurity and get stuck, in order to find ways back to a safe connection
- Help each other deal with attachment issues
- Create a story of falling in love again and again
- Create a future love story for the next five to ten years
- Create your own rituals that prove to be successful in your own relationship

Assessing your relationship and your adjustment to change:

The Dyadic Adjustment scale:

You and your partner could take this test in order to evaluate your level of adjustment before starting the MFT program at CSUN

- The Dyadic Adjustment scale (DAS) represents a 32-Items scale that evaluates the relationship of married couples or unmarried cohabitating couples. It was designed to measure marital adjustment, and to complete different functions
- The DAS continues to be a popular assessment instrument in order to evaluate the adjustment of couples
- The format of the scale has a range of 0-151 and allocates for easy scoring, and can be completed in a very short period of time due to its length of only two pages

DYADIC ADJUSTMENT SCALE

Most persons have disagreements in their relationships. Please indicate below the approximate extent of agreement or disagreement between you and your partner for each item on the following list.

	Always Agree	Almost Always Agree	Occa- sionally Disagree	Fre- quently Disagree	Almost Always Disagree	Always Disagree
1. Handling family finances	0	0	0	0	0	0
2. Matters of recreation	0	0	0	0	0	0
3. Religious matters	0	0	0	0	0	0
4. Demonstrations of affection	0	0	0	0	0	0
5. Friends	0	0	0	0	0	0
6. Sex relations	0	0	0	0	0	0
7. Conventionality (correct or proper behavior)	0	0	0	0	0	0
8. Philosophy of life	0	0	0	0	0	0
9. Ways of dealing with parents or in-laws	0	0	0	0	0	0
10. Aims, goals, and things believed important	0	0	0	0	0	0
11. Amount of time spent together	0	0	0	0	0	0
12. Making major decisions	0	0	0	0	0	0
13. Household tasks	0	0	0	0	0	0
14. Leisure time interests and activities	0	0	0	0	0	0
15. Career decisions	0	0	0	0	0	0

	All the time	Most of the time	More often than not	Occa- sionally	Rarely	Never
16. How often do you discuss or have you considered divorce, separation, or terminating your relationship?	0	0	0	0	0	0
17. How often do you or your mate leave the house after a fight?	0	0	0	0	0	0
18. In general, how often do you think that things between you and your partner are going well?	0	0	0	0	0	0
19. Do you confide in your mate?	0	0	0	0	0	0
20. Do you ever regret that you married? (<i>or lived together</i>)	0	0	0	0	0	0
21. How often do you and your partner quarrel?	0	0	0	0	0	0
22. How often do you and your mate "get on each other's nerves?"	0	0	0	0	0	0

	Every Day	Almost Every Day	Occasionally	Rarely	Never
23. Do you kiss your mate?	0	0	0	0	0

	All of them	Most of them	Some of them	Very few of them	None of them
24. Do you and your mate engage in outside interests together?	0	0	0	0	0

How often would you say the following events occur between you and your mate?

	Never	Less than once a month	Once or twice a month	Once or twice a week	Once a day	More often
25. Have a stimulating exchange of ideas	0	0	0	0	0	0
26. Laugh together	0	0	0	0	0	0
27. Calmly discuss something	0	0	0	0	0	0
28. Work together on a project	0	0	0	0	0	0

These are some things about which couples sometimes agree and sometime disagree. Indicate if either item below caused differences of opinions or were problems in your relationship during the past few weeks. (Check yes or no)

	Yes	No
29. <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> Being too tired for sex.		
30. <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> Not showing love.		

31. The circles on the following line represent different degrees of happiness in your relationship. The middle point, "happy," represents the degree of happiness of most relationships. Please fill in the circle which best describes the degree of happiness, all things considered, of your relationship.

0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Extremely Unhappy	Fairly Unhappy	A Little Unhappy	Happy	Very Happy	Extremely Happy	Perfect

32. Which of the following statements best describes how you feel about the future of your relationship?

- I want desperately for my relationship to succeed, and *would go to almost any length* to see that it does.
- I want very much for my relationship to succeed, and *will do all I can* to see that it does.
- I want very much for my relationship to succeed, and *will do my fair share* to see that it does.
- It would be nice if my relationship succeeded, but *I can't do much more than I am doing now* to help it succeed.
- It would be nice if it succeeded, but *I refuse to do any more than I am doing now* to keep the relationship going.
- My relationship can never succeed, and *there is no more that I can do* to keep the relationship going.

- Scoring 101 and below = Relationally distress
- Scoring 102 and higher = Relationally nondistressed

→ If the completion of this test reveals a distressed relationship you might want to:

- Talk to your partner
- Look up Emotional Focused Therapy for Couples at:
<http://www.iceeft.com/>
- Look up books from John M. Gottman, PhD, such as:
 - The Seven Principles for Making a Marriage Work
 - The Relationship Cure
 - 10 Lessons to Transforms Your Marriage
- Look up the book from Sue Johnson, PhD:
 - Hold me tight
- Look up the book from Valerie Whiffen, PhD, and Susan Johnson EdD:
 - Attachment Processes in Couples and Family Therapy
- Schedule couple therapy sessions

APPENDIX B

PROJECT EVALUATION FORM

An Online Guide for Returning, in a Committed Relationship Marriage and Family

Therapy Students

By: Nathalie May

Name: _____

Date: _____

1. On a scale from 1 to 10, with 0 being poor and 10 being excellent, how would you rate this online guide?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

2. Does the online guide successfully answer all the questions you may have had?
3. Does the online guide raise issues you did not think about previously?
4. Does the online guide answer the questions raised by the author satisfactorily?
5. Does the online guide provide a good overview of the main issues?
6. In your opinion, is there any information missing from the online guide?

7. What was the most helpful in the online guide?

8. What was the least helpful in the online guide?

9. Would you recommend the online guide to your peers?

10. Questions? Comments? Suggestions?