grow Wild

BONUS HANDOUT

Tool #1: Psychological Flexibility

WHAT TO DO

1. **Keep your mind stimulated by learning something new every day.** This doesn't need to be complicated, could be a new word, historical fact, or trivia. Learn a new hobby, learn to dance or paint. This exercise activates part of the brain's essential structures.

2. **Do something differently often.** Introduce change to normal activities. Sit in a different spot to watch tv, sit in a different seat at dinner, drink coffee with your less dominant hand. This allows the brain to use different pathways than the ones you use by default.

3. **Do different things.** Don't do what you normally do. One of my favorites is to take a different route to school or work each day. Wear different clothes than you normally wear. Exercise in a different way. Pick different activities for date night. Order different food than you normally would. This activates and stimulates the brain.

WHAT TO SAY

Say to yourself...

"I need to give myself room to think on difficult thoughts and take their power away. I don't want to be fearful of my thoughts."

"Am I living my life on autopilot? I want to take the controls, slow down, and focus on the present moment."

"I am aware of my thoughts but I am not my thoughts. I don't want my thoughts to control who I am."

Tool #2: Mindfulness

WHAT TO DO

1. **Mindful breathing.** Focus on your breathing. One technique is to sit comfortably with a straight spine and neck. As you inhale, count to 4 in your mind. Hold your breath for 7 seconds. Then exhale, counting to 8, making a whoosh sound. Be aware of your breath and the feeling of air entering and exiting your lungs.

2. **Mindful eating.** Be aware of the present by savoring food with all your senses. How does it feel, smell, look, sound, and taste? Slow down and consider the food you are eating.

3. **Mindfulness is about focusing on and being in the present moment.** Engaging with everything around you in that moment.

WHAT TO SAY

Say to yourself...

"Am I taking in every moment and experiencing it?"

"I am allowed to create space in my day to focus on my mental health."

"Focusing on mindfulness is good for me and my marriage."

Tool #3: Expectations

WHAT TO DO

1. **Learn to manage your expectations.** Become aware of what you expect as well as what you should expect.

2. **Communicate what you expect and why.** Be open to discussing each other's expectations and coming to a mutual agreement.

3. **Recognize when an expectation is unrealistic or unhealthy.**

Check out these additional tips from verywellmind:

- Ask yourself what you're expecting from a situation.
- Look for the positives in what you already have.
- Remind yourself that social media posts aren't always realistic.
- Don't beat yourself up for feeling disappointed.

WHAT TO SAY

Say to yourself...

In a new situation with your spouse, ask yourself,
"*What do I expect to happen?*"

Ask yourself,
"*Should my expectations be this way?*" "*Where did these expectations come from and are they realistic?*"

If you are disappointed, ask yourself,
"*Was what I expected realistic?*"
If it was, make a plan for next time. If it wasn't, think about managing your expectations.

WHAT TO SAY

Say to your spouse...

When you feel disappointed with them/a situation, etc.:
"*I was expecting _____ to happen, and it didn't. Were we not on the same page? What can we do to make sure we're on the same page moving forward?*"

When you're happy/excited/pleased with a situation, etc.:
"*Thank you for _____ . I really appreciate it. May I set this as an expectation moving forward?*"

Tool #4: Communication

WHAT TO DO

1. **Share daily affirmations with each other.** Research done by the National Marriage Project in 2011 revealed that the happiest married couples have 5 times as many positive interactions as negative interactions. So, how can you make that happen in your marriage? Make it a point to tell your spouse one thing you appreciate about them, one thing you're thankful for, or one thing you love about them every single day.

2. **Ask questions once a week.** You may have been married for years and even dated for a long time before that, and you may think you know all there is to know about each other, but people grow, learn, and change every single day and so does your relationship. You and your spouse experience a lot of life together, but you don't share a brain, so there's actually a lot to find out about each other. Schedule a "weekly meeting" to get together and ask each other some questions, like "What was the highlight of your week?" or "When did you feel the closest to me this week?" or maybe even "What's something that you want from me?"

3. **Touch and stare as much as you can.** You've heard the saying "actions speak louder than words." Well, guess what? It's TRUE.

According to Dr. Albert Mehrabian's famous 1970's research on communication, only 7% of communication is verbal. 38% comes through your tone of voice. 55% comes through body language.

In other words, if you want to communicate well with your spouse and let them know you love them, respect them and appreciate them, hold their hand, kiss them on the cheek, pat them on the hiney, and stare at them from across the room, not just once in a blue moon, but every. Single. Day.

This will take some work, and it may even feel a little awkward at first if you're not already doing it regularly, but it will make a world of difference in your relationship.

WHAT TO SAY

Say to yourself...

"I am in control of the words that come out of my mouth, my tone of voice and my body language."

"I am not in control of my spouse or many of the situations surrounding us."

"Is what I'm about to communicate helpful or hurtful to my spouse?"

"Is what I'm about to communicate helpful or hurtful to my marriage?"

WHAT TO SAY

Say to your spouse...

When you have a miscommunication or misunderstanding:
"I feel (hurt/lost/alone/abandoned/disrespected, etc.) by what you said/did. Here's why..."

When you are guilty of miscommunication or misunderstanding:
"I apologize for making you feel _____ . I hear you and I see you. It wasn't my intention to make you feel that way. What can I do to help us move past this miscommunication?"

When you feel like communication is going well in your relationship/ you're on the same page:
"Thank you for _____ . It makes me feel (validated/secure/loved/seen/known, etc.) What do I do that makes you feel (validated/secure/loved/seed/known, etc.)?

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