

Gary P. Monkarsh, Ph.D.
Clinical Psychologist
14523 Westlake Drive
Lake Oswego, OR 97035
(503) 810-4172

Effective Couples and Family Therapy Approaches

I. Couples Therapy

My couples therapy approach emphasizes utilizing a combination of Mindfulness based Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) with Structural/Systemic family therapy approaches.

- I. My first step in the therapeutic process involves establishing rapport with each partner by meeting alone with each to build the foundations for a strong therapeutic connection, as well as to learn about their unique history, current family situation, and to clarify their presenting concerns and goals for therapy.
2. In the first couple's therapy session, I begin the process by encouraging each partner to share a current appreciation for the other, asking each to share what attracted them to the other, and what interests and activities they engaged in that brought them closer together in the courtship phase of their relationship. (Invariably, couples realize that they allowed those bonding activities to be shelved due to various life challenges, such as career or raising children.) In later couple sessions, we expand appreciations beyond behaviors (i.e.-thanks for making breakfast) to deeper appreciations of the other partner's good character, ethics, and morality, such as sharing appreciation for the other's loyalty, strong work ethic, and loving and selfless devotion for family members.
3. After establishing a positive tone in the initial couple's session, ***I encourage each partner to share their goals for Self-improvement over the course of couple's therapy. In other words, each partner is asked what they think they could do to positively impact their relationship in a healing manner.*** This request typically comes as a surprise to couples, given their typical expectation is that they will be given the opportunity to explain what is wrong with their partner, and what their partner needs to change, rather than focusing on what they can do to improve their relationship. This gentle suggestion helps initiate the process by which couples move away from a desire to control their partner, and instead moves them towards positive collaboration, compromise, and empathy for one another.
3. Communication skill building occurs at the onset of couple's therapy, and I ***share that effective communication has a similar flow to a pleasant flight,***

(with smooth take off, cruising without turbulence, and a smooth landing,) in that successful communication has a smooth start-up with pleasantries and appreciations; calmly discussing the main topic of the communication by making non-threatening 'I' statements and sharing positive needs; and then ends with a light topic such as the entertainment they are looking forward to on their date night over the weekend.

More specifically, the communication skills building involves the following steps:

- A. The smooth start up to deep communication involves engaging in gentle small talk regarding non-controversial topics such as schedules, food, weather, sports, hobbies, etc...
- B. During the main communication, each partner is mentored on using "I" statements in sharing their feelings and needs, while avoiding using accusatory "you statements," or using descriptors "always, and never" when describing their concerns or their partner.
- C. Couples are counseled on how critical the timing is for positive communication outcomes. Both are encouraged to collectively choose a time to speak in which both are rested, calm, and can give their undivided attention to their partner. They are also warned to never engage in these conversations when either feels hungry, ill, or exhausted, just prior to bedtime, or when they are traveling in a motor vehicle where time-outs are difficult or impossible to initiate.
- D. The couple is encouraged to engage in short-length communications with their partner, because sharing more than 3-5 minutes of needs and feelings can easily overwhelm the listener, and prevent them from effectively empathizing with their partner who just spoke. By agreeing to no more than a 3-5 minutes of speaking and then giving the listener a chance to empathically respond for up to two minutes, couples are far more likely to feel heard and understood.
- E. The listener is encouraged to imagine taking their ego, and 'hog tying it and gagging it' when preparing to respond to their partners' shared needs and concerns. By ('hog-tying and gagging') I refer to shutting down the listener's ego, so that the listener only focuses on the content and feeling component of their partner's message, instead of focusing on their rebuttal, opinions, or judgements, which are all within the realm of one's ego. When the listener successfully contains their ego, their speaking partner is far

more likely to feel understood, and appreciated. *When the listener is not constrained by their ego, they are encouraged to freely share their understanding and compassion for their partner's expressed needs and feelings, which leads the speaker to feel validated and appreciated for expressing their true self.*

F. The couple is then encouraged to avoid engaging in what Dr. John Gottman, Ph.D., describes as “The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse,” in communication. These 4 horsemen include Criticism, Contempt, Defensiveness, and Stonewalling. *I share a 5th Horseman that I add to this list- the horseman of Assumption in communication, as another source of deep division that could lead to a dissolution of the relationship.*

G. In place of these damaging communication styles, I mentor couples in developing non-violent, emotionally intelligent communication patterns, in which each listener provides an empathic summary of what their partner shared, without any negative judgement.

H. I also encourage the couple's communication to emphasize sharing needs, as described in Dr. Marshall Rosenberg's book, Non-Violent Communication, because “needs are always positive,” as opposed to thoughts and feelings, which often are highly charged and negative in tone. Some examples of sharing positive needs include:

Needs for: acceptance, affection, appreciation, cooperation, intimacy, love, respect, security, stability, and support. These needs should not be confused by making specific behavioral demands, such as “go do the dishes, or pick up the dog's mess on the carpet.” When one offers deeply felt needs, they create a non-threatening communication to their partner by wanting to reach out with a hand, rather than sharing hurtful, judgments or criticisms of their partner. Also by sharing these global needs, the listener will likely not feel controlled or told what to do, which avoids resistance and conflict.

The Mindfulness Element to Couple's therapy: Focusing on Living in the Present Moment, rather than focusing on the past or future

My mindfulness approach emphasizes living in the present moment which is “the sweet spot for contentment.” **Avoiding overfocusing on the past or future creates a hopeful tone in the couples' communication, because they can work with the present, but are helpless to do anything about the past or future.** The use of our past experiences is critical for developing

knowledge and wisdom of what works and does not work in relationship communication and behaviors, and emotional expression. However, when we overfocus on the past, it tends to breed feelings of depression, helplessness, resentment, and sense of powerlessness.

Alternatively, by overfocusing on the future, we tend to breed anxious feelings because like when the focus is on the past, we have no control over the future. While it is helpful to have future goals, it becomes problematic when our focus in life emphasizes our future at the expense of living and appreciating the preciousness of each living breath in each present moment.

Mindfulness Instruction

In my mindfulness-based CBT for couples, I offer the couple a training in learning a deep relaxation technique which includes elements of progressive muscle relaxation, training in deep diaphragmatic breathing, self-hypnosis instruction, and teaching to place their focus/concentration on their breath. More specifically, each partner is trained to focus on taking very slow and deep breaths, and then carefully noticing their body and mind responding by letting go of tension, and tightness, and becoming more present focused.

They also are taught to be curious about noticing the wanderings of their minds away from their focus on the breath throughout this relaxation exercise, and learn to acknowledge thoughts, feelings, and body sensations that come into their awareness without judgment. During this relaxed, aware state of mind, the couple becomes less judgmental of self and other, and becomes more open minded to appreciate their partner's opposing points of view.

By focusing on each inhale and exhale, we become more skilled in being present focused, and more aware of our minds taking us to past and future thoughts, feelings, and sensations. The couple is also taught to bring their attention back to their "home base" of their breaths when they notice the wanderings of their minds, which further enhances their focus on the present moment. Not only does this approach help unclutter the mind, but it also helps reduce ADHD- related concentration problems by focusing one's attention on breathing.

This practice of mindfully taking up to 20 or more minutes focusing on taking deep, slow, breaths has the added benefit of creating the alpha state in the brain, which promotes the relaxation response, reduces stress, lowers heart rate, blood pressure, supports emotional regulation, and improves creativity.

Non-Violent/Emotionally Intelligent Communication Encouraged

My couples therapy approach emphasizes positive psychology in which the sessions begin by each partner offering appreciations to the other that are relevant to their current life situation. For example, one partner may thank the other for unexpectedly cooking a delicious meal for them or showing support for them when they expressed anxiety about their current career situation. Additionally, I encourage couples at the beginning of their couples session to offer a small offering of a gift to the other as a way to create good will at the onset of the therapy session.

Once the appreciations and the gift offering is made, each member tends to be in a more peaceful, open-minded headspace to listen to their partner share their needs, and concerns in the present moment.

At this stage, I emphasize both non-violent communication as espoused by Marshall Rosenberg, Ph.D. and avoiding communication pitfalls described by Dr. John Gottman's research findings of the four horseman of the apocalypse in relationship communication, which include Criticism, Defensiveness, Stonewalling and Contempt. So throughout the therapy process, I encourage each partner to use "I statements" and to share their needs without judging or blaming their partner.

I also help couples delineate feelings from non-feelings related words. For example, if someone tells their partner that they feel betrayed or they feel intimidated or they feel criticized, those are not feelings, they are words of evaluation rather than feelings. In contrast, feeling words encouraged in the couples therapy include words like sad, insecure, lonely, discouraged, tired, nervous, or alarmed.

Once a partner shares their needs and their feelings briefly, the respondent is encouraged to first reflect back with empathy on what they have heard summarizing the main point that their partner has attempted to make as a way to show validation for their partner's thoughts, feelings, and needs, and also as a means to put on hold the listener's ego in which often defensiveness and stonewalling can occur when one's ego feels threatened.

When feeling threatened, our egos commonly hijack conversations away from our partner's expressed needs, wants, feelings, and thoughts and onto a different topic that is reflecting the listener's thoughts, feelings, and needs at the expense of that of their speaking partner. By shutting that ego defensive pattern down, communication between speaker and listener significantly improves.

Finding the right time for Deep Conversation/ and Conflict Resolution

Timing is crucial for effective, empathic, reciprocal communication to be successful. For example, I warn couples to never have deep conversations when they are driving in a motor vehicle, or when either is exhausted, sick, hungry, or getting ready for bed. Instead, I encourage couples to find time to meet in which both are calm and open minded, typically after a day of rest on the weekends when distractions are at a minimum.

One recommended option involves the couple setting aside at least one hour a week where they are rested and in a relatively positive headspace to connect on a deeper level. For example, after a restful weekend morning and a lovely meal together, they devote at least an hour together to discuss positive goals, and needs in a non-threatening manner.

The importance of taking time-outs before one becomes emotionally dysregulated

Time-outs are a critical element of non-violent and emotionally intelligent communication.

=Having been a director of a domestic violence program for offenders in 1989, I am particularly sensitive to both verbal and non-verbal communication that is violent in nature.

Examples of violent communication include raising the voice, swearing, name calling, and threatening the listener with abandonment or even physical harm. Additionally, while not specifically violent in nature, couples are informed of the importance of avoiding making “you statements” as opposed to “I statements” in which the speaker negatively judges and labels their partner while making negative accusations about them.

Sometimes, despite developing violence prevention measures, couples who begin to initiate violent communication are immediately encouraged to halt their communication and take a brief time-out away from their partner until they are emotionally stable and calm.

Strategically taking time outs prior to becoming verbally or non-verbally aggressive is the most effective violence preventive measure one can take. In order to achieve success in this effort to maintain non-violent communication, the couple is schooled in becoming aware of their unique physical warning signs that precede emotionally dysregulated states. For example, people are taught to observe their increased rate of respiration, heart rate, sweating and tensing of muscles, and clenching of the jaw, that commonly occur when individuals are being triggered toward a dysregulated emotional state of mind.

To give a hypothetical example, let us say a husband is angry at his wife for giving a male co-worker attention. Instead of impulsively sharing his negative assumptions of what his wife is thinking or feeling about this man, he is encouraged to first take a time-out to calm his mind, and once calm, ask her a non-leading question about her relationship, such as “What is the nature of your interaction with him?”

Once she responds, he is then encouraged to share his hopes/needs for appropriate interaction between his wife and her male co-worker, while also demonstrating trust in his wife’s ability to appropriately boundary set with her co-worker.

An alternate example involves the conflict that can occur when a highly organized and tidy partner encounters their more disorganized partner’s messes in their home environment.

Collaboration becomes the most effective tool navigating the fair division of labor in the family home.

More specifically, in the case of a messy, disorganized kitchen, the more organized partner is encouraged to work hand-in-hand with their partner in creating the clean and organized kitchen the tidy partner envisions. /*During this collaboration, it is critical that the leading partner focuses on positive change, as opposed to emphasizing what their less organized partner has done wrong in the past.

When partners work together, I offer them a three-step approach for successful

collaborative outcomes to reduce conflict which include the following:

1. The leading partner completes all of the steps needed for the successful completion of the task they are teaching while the learning partner watches (i.e.-loading and unloading a dishwasher).
2. The second step of the collaboration involves the couple working as partners in completing this dishwasher task successfully from start to finish.
3. The third step of the collaboration involves the learning partner demonstrate their newly learned dishwashing skill by teaching the skill to their teaching partner.

If the learning partner is unsuccessful in completing the task, the couple is encouraged to restart the process at step one, until the learning partner is successful, and has placed their new skill “into muscle memory.” It is interesting to note, that when I share this three-step collaborative process with physicians and their partners, they have often reported that this three-step process was the way many of their medical school professors taught them new skills as medical students.

Structural/Systemic Couple’s and Family therapy approaches:

Some Key considerations of Structural family therapy include the following:

1. *Is there balance in the power structure within the couple?*
 - a. *For example, is one partner controlling, and the other partner passive? If so, therapy focuses on rebalancing the power dynamic between the partners so that each is respected equally when expressing their true self thoughts, feelings, needs, and goals.*
2. *Is there a primary alliance between partners, in which their alliance take precedence over all other alliances (i.e.-over in laws, parent-child, etc.)? If not, is there an alliance or alliances with a partner and friend, co-worker or other family member that serves to diminish the bond between partners? If so, family therapy approaches strive to eliminate the primacy of those alliances outside of the couple relationship.*
3. *Is there a clear hierarchical structure for parents and children, in which parents are the ultimate decision makers at the top of the family hierarchy?*
 - a. *If not, are there triangulations between one parent and child diminishing the power and authority of the other parent, to the detriment of the child and the parents relationship?*
4. *Is there a fair division of labor between partners, and children, commensurate with the child’s developmental skill level?*
 - a. *If not, is there co-dependent, enabling behavior occurring, either toward one’s*

partner or able-bodied older child?

5. Are both parents given equal authority to discipline their children?

- a. If not, is one parent over-controlling, and not willing to allow their partner to have an equal say in determining when and how to discipline their children when they defy them or break agreed upon family rules?**

My structural couples and family therapy approach emphasizes the importance of maintaining healthy boundaries, and balance between partners' roles, and equal power-sharing within their relationship.

For example, if one spouse appears overly controlling of the other, I explain the critical importance of both partners allowing each other to freely express their true selves without reservation, without fear of retribution, and without fear of being told they are wrong for expressing themselves.

Additionally, if one partner has an alliance with another person that supersedes their primary alliance, the couple is encouraged to rebalance their alliances such that their alliance takes top priority, and the partners are schooled in how to effectively communicate that change to the person that had become triangulated in their relationship.

Parent Counseling Strategies in Family Therapy:

When working with parents having challenges in their co-parenting relationship, I offer them a simple 3-step child behavior management plan. This plan consists of the following:

1. Parents create 2-3 basic family rules for their children: For example-
 1. The children will listen to their parents and do what they are told without arguing.
 2. The children will engage in non-violent behaviors and communication inside and outside of home. I.e.-they will keep their hands and feet to themselves, unless involved in reciprocal shows of affection, such as a goodbye hug, or goodnight kiss that is acceptable to the receiving party.

Parents develop a consequence program when their children break family rules

1. These consequences are non-violent, and are of the shortest duration to get the desired deterrent effect.
2. These consequences are not debated, and parents avoid getting into power struggles talking with their kids who attempt to defy them.

Parents offer their children the opportunity to choose immediate, short term, midterm, and long-term rewards/celebrations for successfully following their family rules.

1. Some children respond to immediate rewards such as stickers and gold stars
2. Other children need tangible rewards such as a trip to the ice cream shop, getting new Legos, or going to pet puppies at the pet store.

To summarize this Behavior Management Plan, once those two basic family rules are established, then the parents are encouraged to come up with consequences for their children not following family rules. It should be noted that consequences are utilized as a last resort after attempts fail to change behavior by positively reinforcing their children when following family rules with celebrations and rewards.

Further, positive reinforcement provides children the opportunity to share what they would like to earn as celebrations for successfully following their parents' directives. For example, children are encouraged to complete low frequency behaviors before engaging in pleasurable activities- i.e.,=completing chores, self-care activities such as bathing and brushing teeth, completing academic work, or performing age-appropriate family chores prior to engaging in high frequency behavior (i.e.-utilizing electronic entertainment.)

These skills are particularly challenging when working with children who are diagnosed with ADHD, Autism Spectrum Disorder, or Oppositional Defiant Disorder. When working with these children, it is critical to build close, meaningful connection, and quality time spent with each parent during one-on-one time together. During these bonding times, the parent mirrors the behaviors they are trying to teach their children, and practice engaging in reciprocal and non-violent communication.

Returning to the collaboration between co-parents, it is critically important that their alliance is paramount in providing support for the other when either is attempting to set limits or boundaries with each of their children so that there is not a disparity between the expectations of one parent over the other with regard to a particular target behavior or problem interaction.

Another important parenting strategy is emphasizing effort over outcome when assisting their children attempting to complete work independently, and when they engage in group activities and sports with friends, teammates, siblings, and parents.

For example, if an ADHD symptomatic child struggles to get their work done at a high level despite their best efforts, and produces average or below average overall work, the parents are encouraged to celebrate that child's effort as opposed to the outcome, so grades are not overemphasized to the detriment of the child's self-esteem, After celebrating their child's effort, parents are guided to schedule consistent collaboration between their child and tutors, study buddies, and parents to support the child's efforts to improve his/her academic performance.

The same is true for that child's efforts in self-care or in care for the home environment. The collaborative approach I previously noted is an excellent way to build skill for each of the parents' children that is consistent with their developmental level, and emphasizes progress and effort rather than outcome. Effort is the primary focus which helps build the child's self-esteem as their effort continues to improve.

The Importance of parents accepting varying skills among children in the family

The parents invariably observe how different each of their children's personalities are, and how varied their abilities are as well. One of their children might be incredibly independent and a self-starter, and needing little to no supervision, while another of their children might require intensive effort and collaboration for them to stay on task and be successful in completing whatever tasks or goals they have set for themselves or that their parents have created for them.

Again, emphasizing effort over outcome can help the less independent and slower self-starting child from negatively comparing themselves to their more independent sibling, as their efforts are celebrated. Additionally, it is critical that their less skilled child experiences equal bonding opportunities with their parents that builds their self-esteem, through quality one on one time with each parent to reduce the likelihood that that child and sibling has a negative self-image as a result of comparing themselves unfavorably to their sibling or their peer group.

Unfortunately, I have observed repeatedly over the past 40 years, parents consciously and unconsciously favoring their more skilled and confident child over their less skilled child, and have seen the negative consequences of such favoritism, such as the less skilled child developing drug and alcohol addictions, school truancy issues, and running away from home.

The Importance of creating a ritual of daily family connection between parents and children

Family communication is also emphasized in family therapy, encouraging the parents and children to sit together at least one mealtime a day to be able to hear from the other about their experience of that day and show interest and support for each of their children as they share their life experiences.

The importance of utilizing a multidisciplinary team when dealing with severe behavioral, social, or emotional problems among children:

In the most severe behavioral disturbances among children and adolescents, it is helpful to empower the parents to engage with their medical system, i.e., their child's pediatrician, the academic system through teachers and administrative staff in their school, and finally the criminal justice system, should their teenage child not demonstrate appropriate respect for legal boundaries either at home or outside of the home. **By collaborating with the academic, medical, and criminal justice systems, effective behavioral management goals are far more likely to be met.**

One tragic example when parents require the assistance of the criminal justice system is when an adolescent son or daughter suffering from oppositional defiant behaviors and antisocial conduct disorder symptoms, test the boundaries and limits of the parents by destroying property within the home or even causing serious bodily harm to family members. In this scenario, the parents are encouraged to contact the local police department where family intervention trained officers

typically arrive to the family home to counsel their son or daughter on appropriate boundaries and limits to their behavior. They also typically warn the teen of the real-life consequences that occur if they do not respect the law and their parents demands for them to exclusively engage in non-violent behaviors. They also typically explain to the teen that if they do not control their behaviors, they will likely lose their freedom, and end up in a locked detention center for an undetermined period of time.

Often times, parents are shocked when discussing the seriousness of their child's violent behavior. However, by coming to terms with the possibility that their child could be removed from their home, the parents realize their denial of the seriousness of the teen's behavior is more likely to harm their teen far more than being honest with them about the consequences of their actions. In fact, over time, their teen typically benefits from learning about the illegality of violent behaviors, and is an important element to their teen's overall effective treatment.

Realizing the seriousness of their child's social, emotional, and behavioral problems is a positive step in beginning to advocate for their child to obtain assessment and treatment from psychologists, counselors, physicians, teachers, and other mentors. These teens also benefit from receiving a comprehensive psychological evaluation to provide an effective treatment plan that successfully improves the teens social, emotional, behavioral, and academic functioning.

Summary of Communication Skills emphasized in Treatment:

In a summary of the communication skill building I teach, **I emphasize developing a non-violent communication approach in which needs are expressed as a primary driver of positive change in both a couple relationship, in family relationships between siblings, and parents and children.**

As I previously noted, needs are always positive, and when we focus on combining mindfulness-based living in the present moment, with expressing current needs, we avoid engaging in the 'Four horseman of the Apocalypse' of communication as Dr. John Gottman highlights from his research at the University of Washington, in which he determined that Criticism, Contempt, Defensiveness, and Stonewalling are strong predictors of relationship failure.

When one begins the therapy by focusing on appreciations and a gift, and then shares a short expression of a current need, it is far more likely to be accepted by the listener in a non-defensive way. However, if the listener immediately moves into defensive or ego mode in which he or she tries to defend his behavior or his thoughts or feelings, I gently provide an opportunity for that individual to put aside their ego and try once more to reflect the concerns, wishes, and needs their partner has just expressed. Now it is important to note that an ego focus tends to lead to defensiveness, and conflict.

I add a fifth horseman to the apocalypse in communication: Assumption

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This fifth horseman of the apocalypse I describe as assumption or assuming what our partner is thinking, feeling, planning, or intending. In nearly all cases, when one partner assumes what the other is thinking, planning, feeling, or behaving either in or outside of their presence, misunderstandings and accusations occur that create a no-win, crazy making situation for both members of the couple, because assuming what the other is thinking or feeling cannot be proven or disproven.

I describe this assuming as attempting to read their partner's mind, which ultimately leads to a failure of communication. As a result, in my couple's psychotherapy, each partner learns to transform what they are assuming into open-ended questions that are non-threatening toward their partner.

For example, if one partner fears that the other is more focused on spending time with their friend and values time with their friend more than their partner, they can ask a non-leading question such as "how much time do you want to spend with your friend in comparison to the time you want to spend with me this weekend?" In this way, the partner does not assume what their partner's preference is regarding spending time with them versus their friend. Removing assumptions in relationship communication has a highly beneficial effect supporting open communication between partners.

Summary of Successful Treatment Outcomes for Couples and Families:

In my work with couples, effective treatment outcomes lead to the following:

1. ***Prioritizing weekly, private bonding time for the couple to engage in pleasurable activities,*** such as a 'date night or date day', free from the demands, worries, and attention to the stressors in life (such as finances, work, or kids).
2. ***Ensuring a daily sharing of appreciations for the other.***
3. ***Creating a daily check-in regarding the successes, and challenges*** the day brought to both, as well as sharing of positive needs.
4. ***Setting aside a minimum of weekly "self and couple improvement" discussion time*** should the need arise, ***to discuss areas of conflict, and differences, with empathy, flexibility, and open mindedness, free from the shackles of the partners' egos.***
5. ***Creating a partner super-alliance,*** which supersedes all other alliances each partner may have with their extended family, friends, co-workers, or children.

In this way, no triangulations with third parties occur in which the spouse/partner left out feels powerless to change.

6. ***Creating an equal power structure within the couple relationship;*** such that neither

feel steamrolled into passively doing whatever their partner wants them to do. Instead, ***offering space and empathy for each to freely share their true-self thoughts, feelings, and needs***, without fear of reprisal, and instead being co-equal creators of their collective priorities, and life choices regarding work, social lives, and the fair division of labor.

7. ***Creating an equal overall division of labor*** between partners/spouses, in which both believe each is working equitably in managing the responsibilities of caring for their family, children, home, and finances.
8. ***Building communication skills*** that emphasize living in the present moment, focusing on positive hopes and needs, rather than over focusing on the past or future, while emphasizing making “I” statements, and avoiding using words such as always or never when describing concerns about their partner.
9. ***Utilizing effective conflict resolution skills such as strategically taking brief time-outs*** to cool off if one or other partner begins to experience emotional dysregulation, such as raising voice, and making global negative judgments of their partner.

In my work with parents and families, effective treatment outcomes lead to the following:

1. ***Parents become unified in implementing a parenting plan that emphasizes kind but firm interaction with their children.*** In this way, they consistently set expectations with their kids regarding non-violent behavior and communication, and collectively teach them life skills, effective communication, and compassion for others, starting with their siblings.
2. ***Parents back up their spouse/partner when disciplining their children who are acting inappropriately,*** utilizing non-violent consequences of the shortest duration to positively change their child’s behavior.
3. ***Parents schedule meaningful one-on-one time for each to provide their children*** on a weekly basis to build their special bonds with their children, and to create the good will that comes from that bonding time which encourages their children to want to follow the lead of their parents.
4. ***Parents emphasize effort over outcome,*** when encouraging their children to put in the best effort in whatever they attempt to accomplish, whether it be related to academics, the creative arts, sports, or socializing with their peer group or siblings.
5. ***Parents consistently shower their kids with affection, and appreciation for them,*** regardless of the outcome of their efforts, and especially when they “fail,” clearly demonstrating their love is unconditional, and not dependent on the child’s successes, such that jealousy, and insecurities do not develop within siblings as a result of being negatively compared to each other.

6. ***Parents lead the way in developing a healthy balance in the lives of their children***, so their children have meaningful time for family togetherness, for social activities outside of the home, for leisure activities, for academic effort, for time in nature outside of the home, for physical education, and sports, and for positive self-care, and care for the family home.
7. ***Parents set appropriate boundaries and guardrails around use of smart devices*** that can lead to depression, anxiety, and social isolation in children as a result of over-focusing on video games or social media.
8. ***Assisting parents in the difficult steps in the process of letting go of their children as they prepare to leave the nest***, while continuing to be supportive and a source of wisdom for their children throughout their lives.
9. ***Parents create a daily family mealtime, and family meetings whenever needed***, to encourage each of their children to practice engaging in emotionally intelligent, non-violent communication of needs and feelings in which parents give encouragement and their undivided attention to ensure their kids feel seen, heard, and cared for.
10. ***Parents teach their children to be flexible***, and to compromise whenever possible, in family relationships, and with peers.
11. ***Parents successfully teach their children to delay gratification***, and build the positive habit of completing work before engaging in pleasurable activities.

Gary P. Monkarsh, Ph.D.
Licensed Psychologist
www.garymonkarsh.com
dr@garymonkarsh.com
(503) 810-4172

GPM/meh