Relationship Science Online

Communication & Conflict

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- **Communication: The use of verbal and non-verbal behaviour to transmit and acknowledge receipt of information to-and-from another**
- **Conflict patterns: The communication patterns used during interactions/discussion when individuals perceive problems:**
  - Their partner does not meet responsibilities
  - Their partner deviates from relationship norms and expectations
  - Competing/incongruent relationship goals
- **Conflict can have a negative impact on relationships, especially for those couples that deal with frequent relationship problems and whose conflict patterns are ineffective:**
  - Declines in relationship satisfaction (e.g., Orbuch et al., 2002)
  - Increased risk of break-up (e.g., Kluwer, 2007)
  - Greater depression (e.g., Beach et al., 1998)
  - Poorer health (e.g., Kiecolt-Glaser & Newton, 2001)
  - Interpersonal violence (e.g., Norlander & Eckhart, 2005)
  - Influence the communication/conflict patterns of children (Noller, 2012)

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- **Evidence suggests its not so much the frequency of conflict that is problematic…**
  - Rather the manner in which it is handled that is associated with relationship difficulties
- **Skill building in communication or dealing with communication issues is an aspect of various couple therapies and relationship education/enrichment programs**
  - Cognitive Behavioural Couple Therapy (CBCT, Baucom et al., 2008)
  - Integrative Couple Behavioural Therapy (ICBT, Jacobson & Christensen, 1996)
  - PREPARE/ENRICH (Olson & Flower, 1993)
  - RELATE (Holman et al., 1997)
  - CoupleCare (Halford, 2011)
- **Identifying/assessing constructive and destructive patterns of communication can have profound effects on relationship functioning**
  - Some of the earliest work – Gottman and colleagues in 1970s

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