

Lack of communication ends many marriages

BY PAUL COLLINS
THE CHRONICLE

Research shows that lack of communication is the number one reason that couples divorce, said Susan Wetzel, marriage preparation coordinator for The Family Life Council of Greater Greensboro.

The divorce rate is slightly more than 50 percent for first marriages, said Wetzel, who - along with Rob and Sherrie Harmon - will teach a Couple Communication course.

This four-week series will help partners communicate better about day-to-day issues. Couples will learn 11 skills that will change the way they talk and listen as well as learn a collaborative conflict resolution process.

This series will be held at the Dorothy Bardolph Human Services Center, second floor board room, on Mondays, Jan. 22, Jan. 29, Feb. 5 and Feb. 12 from 7 to 9 p.m. A fee is charged.

Couple Communication is especially for couples who are preparing for marriage or are newly married, but can also be helpful for other couples and people in other relationships (such as work or parent-child relationships), Wetzel said.

"This particular curriculum, the basis of it is caring about yourself and your partner," Wetzel said. "Unless you have a caring attitude about yourself and your partner, it is hard to achieve a satisfactory relationship - whether you have communication skills or not."

"We teach talking skills, listening skills and conflict resolution skills."

"Talking skills - You need to

make sure you get across to your partner your thoughts and sensory data, but also that you (must) convey your wants and your feelings. Those are two things couples don't communicate well enough. If you don't tell your partner what it is that you want, you can't assume your partner knows what you want or is a mind reader.

"Skills in talking - (Speak) for self, which means using 'I' words: I, me, mine, rather than you. It means that you are taking responsibility for what you are saying. By doing that you don't put your partner immediately on the defensive. By doing that, it's much easier to listen to I messages."

"Instead of saying, 'You're lazy. You're not taking out the garbage,' (say, 'I would like you to take out the garbage. It appears to me you are lazy.')

"It's hard to do sometimes. That's why it is a skill. You have to think about what you are saying. Skills are learned behaviors."

"Listening skills - For the listener, it's almost harder to be a good listener than a good speaker, because you want to put your thoughts on hold temporarily and give full attention to your partner, who is talking. Instead of interrupting or rehearsing what you are going to say next - you don't want to be judgmental, to disagree or agree - all you want to do is listen to what your partner is saying at that moment."

"What you can do is do some acknowledgement like nod your head or say, 'Yes go on.' It lets your partner know you are listening and you want to know what is being said."

That will let your partner

know that you are truly listening, which will encourage your partner to get everything off his or her chest.

If the talker thinks you are not listening, it may turn into a fighting or non-constructive situation.

Ideally, Wetzel said, "the talker is the leader (in the conversation), and the listener is the follower."

After the talker is finished talking, the listener then has an opportunity to respond. "That seems to be the best way to communicate effectively," Wetzel said. This approach is mainly for important issues, not necessarily little stuff. This approach is harder because it takes longer to talk about an issue this way.

She also pointed out that issues are not always conflicts.

"Another skill for listeners: It's important for the listener to summarize. (Say, 'Let me see if I understand you right.' (Then summarize what the talker said.)

"The listener's responsibility is to make sure the message received is the same as the message said (or that the talker intended to say). Misunderstandings occur when the listener doesn't hear exactly what the talker is saying."

Sometimes the talker doesn't say what he or she really meant, so if the listener summarizes, "This will clear that up as well."

Sometimes the listener will hear only what he or she wants to hear.

"Part of conflict resolution skills - When you do have a conflict you want to resolve ... you basically want to set up a time when both of you can sit and listen," Wetzel said.



Photo by Kevin Walker

The Family Council of Greater Greensboro is offering a four-week course to help couples communicate better about day-to-day issues.

Sometimes a wife will try to talk to her partner while he's watching a football game, but that's not the right time and the partner may not fully listen.

Instead, say to your partner, "There's something important I want to talk to you about. Is this a good time?" Wetzel said. Both parties need to agree on an appropriate time to discuss conflict so they both can give each other full attention.

Taking a walk together or taking a ride together may provide better settings for discussing conflicts rather than while watching television or eating a meal, or right before going to bed. "You

want to make sure you both have enough energy and time set aside," she said.

In discussing conflicts with your partner, Wetzel said, "In terms of wants, a lot of times you think about wants for yourself only. You also want to think about wants for others. You don't need to just share your wants."

For example, if the wife hates it when her husband goes fishing. The husband could say, "I want you to be happy with my decision. Why don't you like me to go fishing?"

Maybe the wife doesn't like her husband's friend Bob.

"Sometimes it gets into deep-

er issues," Wetzel said.

Thinking about the wants of your partner is key to having a good relationship, Wetzel said.

She said, for example, that her husband likes to get to the airport way early, but she likes to arrive not so early. But to make her husband happy, she goes to the airport early. That's more important to her than having a few minutes more at home before going to the airport, she said.

To register for the Couple Communication class or for more information, call the Family Life Council at 336-6890 (ext. 221). Enrollment is limited. Payment reserves your spot.



From left to right, sorors Sanders, Staten, the director of New Beginning and soror Edwards.

Phi Delta Kappa chapter celebrates Christmas season with residents of New Beginnings

SPECIAL TO THE CHRONICLE

Beta Lambda Chapter of The National Sorority of Phi Delta Kappa visited the residents of New Beginning Assisted Living Center on Dec. 22. The sorority donated a foot

whirlpool to the residents so that each resident will be able to enjoy the gift long after the Christmas season is over. Soror Valarie Edwards also presented each resident with a care package.

Members of the sorority

sang Christmas carols, read Scripture and prayed with the residents of the elderly-home. Kudo Staten led prayer.

Soror Daisy Staten is basileus of Beta Lambda chapter, and she coordinated the project.

Visiting scholar in religion program

SPECIAL TO THE CHRONICLE

HIGH POINT - High Point University inaugurates the Keller Visiting Scholar in Religion Program during the Spring 2001 semester with a distinguished professor and author from Harvard University.

The first visiting scholar is Dr. William A. Graham, professor of the history of religion and Islamic studies, and chairman of the department of Near Eastern languages and civilizations at Harvard University.

Visiting professors in the program for the subsequent two years are Dr. Cheryl J. Sanders, professor of ethics at Howard University's School of Divinity in Washington, D.C. (2002), and Dr. Sharon Daloz Parks, director of The Whidbey Institute in Washington

State and formerly a faculty member in the schools of divinity, business and government at Harvard (2003).

"High Point University is very fortunate to have such distinguished, highly respected scholars teaching such stimulating courses through this new program," said Dr. Harold C. Warlick, chairman of the university's department of religion and philosophy, and program coordinator.

"We are all very excited about the immediate and future prospects for the Keller Visiting Scholar Pro-

gram. This means a lot to our university."

In residence in High Point in January and March, Graham will teach the seminar "To Far Places: Pilgrimage and Journey Religious Phenomena." Limited to 15 students, the seminar will take students on a faith pilgrimage through various religious traditions. The course will require selected readings and a paper researched and written in consultation with Graham and a member of the university's department of religion and philosophy.

During his residency, Graham will deliver the Finch Lecture on "To Far Places: Pilgrimage as Act and Image." Graham teaches "Faith Pilgrimage," a core course at Harvard College involving about 200 students annually. He is

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Sanders

Winston Lake

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that there is a problem," Horsey said, "We want to fight that problem by teaching some survival skills."

Horsey said the Winston Lake Y has some Hispanic members. A Hispanic church congregation also meets at the Y weekly. These and other resources will be tapped, Horsey said, to get Hispanic youngsters in the program.

"We also have a community a stone's throw away from us that is 99 percent Hispanic, and that is Lakeside (Apartments)," Horsey added.

Thornton Eaton and Gregson will teach the class. The two teach

swimming at the Winston Lake Y. Eaton said once black and Hispanic young people get accustomed to the water, swimming comes naturally.

Many have not yet picked up the skill because pools are not readily available to them, Eaton said. Admission prices at the city pools have skyrocketed over the years.

"If they don't have access to facilities, there is nowhere for them to pick up the skill," Eaton said, "but it is one of the best skills you can have."

Horsey is hoping that older children that excel in the program will have an opportunity to be lifeguards at Y's or city pools this coming summer. All participants

will be trained in a style of CPR used by lifeguards and other professionals.

But Horsey, Eaton and Gregson admit that lack of skills is not what keeps many teens from seeking jobs as lifeguards.

"There's a lot of responsibility that goes along with being a lifeguard...It's not like 'Baywatch,'" Gregson said.

Horsey believes the program will have an impact, one that will be felt this summer at local pools and in shrinking drowning statistics. The Y, he said, has a long, glorious record of teaching millions of Americans the art of swimming.

"We have been in the aquatics business for 150 years," he said.

Report: Minority students more likely to get long suspensions

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

GREENSBORO - A report on public school discipline finds that minority students are getting suspended more often for serious offenses than are white students.

Sixty-three percent of students who received long-term suspensions during the past three years were minorities, but minorities comprise only 38 percent of the state's public school enrollment, the new report says.

"These kinds of statistics should be setting off alarms at school systems around the state and at the state level," said Greg Malhoit, executive director of the N.C. Justice and Community Development Center, an advocate for poor and minority citizens.

The state report focused on those students who received long-term suspensions - those that last more than 10 days. They are given for the most serious offenses, such as assaulting teachers, making bomb threats and possessing weapons or drugs.

But the results of the state report, the first to track punishment for serious offenses over

three years, don't surprise many educators.

State officials say the percentages are similar to those in national reports. The U.S. Department of Education said in June that one out of every eight black students was suspended from school three years ago, compared to only one out of every 18 white students.

Some civil rights groups blame the disparity in discipline on racism, but others say chronic misbehavior is related to academic problems. Black and other minority students often score lower than white children on standardized tests, for example.

"Kids who are successful (in school) tend not to be as much of a disciplinary problem," said Henry Johnson, an associate superintendent for the state Department of Public Instruction. "We have to tie the reduction of discipline instances to improved academic success."

The report also showed that black males, who received 43 percent of all long-term suspensions in the past three years, were nearly three times more likely than any other student group to receive the punishment.

Males were three times more likely than females to get long-term suspensions, while ninth-graders received about one-third of all of these suspensions, the report said. Seventy percent of students receiving the suspensions were referred to alternative schooling programs.

Some school systems don't have alternative schools, and others have programs that are far from being top-quality, said state Sen. Bill Martin, D-Guilford.

Lawmakers and school systems might want to improve access to and quality of these programs, said Martin, co-chairman of a legislative study commission on improving performance of minority students.

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