

## Five Essential Practices to Safeguard Your Relationship in Tough Times

### HeartMath's Research Sheds Light on the Role of the Heart in Lasting Love

In times like these, when so many people are experiencing such high levels of stress, fear and anxiety, our relationships inevitably suffer, and in some cases, fall apart completely. Yet strong, caring relationships are vital to our mental, emotional and physical health. [HeartMath](#)<sup>®</sup> has explored human emotions extensively for the past 17 years, using heart rate variability, or heart rhythm patterns, to measure inner emotional states and stress levels. From this research emerged innovative techniques and technologies that utilize the heart's powerful rhythms to intercept and manage stressful emotions. This heart-focused approach helps couples to deal more effectively with the increased stress of today and revitalize their heart connection.

#### **Better Communication Comes from the Heart**

[Research](#) conducted by HeartMath has shown that negative or stressful emotions lead to chaos in the heart's rhythms, which has a harmful effect on the rest of the body. Our ability to think clearly and reason is also impaired during heightened stress; our actions become reactive and our decision-making and communication skills are less effective than when we are in a calmer state.

However, this research also shows that positive emotions like care, love and appreciation creates "coherence" in the heart's rhythms, which is reflected by a smooth and ordered pattern. As the brain and nervous system synchronize to the heart's coherent rhythm, emotional stress is released. The heart, brain and nervous system are in-sync, working in harmony, and the individual experiences enhanced mental and emotional clarity. In this coherent state the capacity for communicating and making decisions is enhanced, we're more intuitive and more sensitive.

Psychologist Deborah Rozman, Ph.D. says, "During these difficult times stress can be extreme and communication is vital to keep our relationships strong. Couples can easily learn how to shift their heart rhythms into coherence, to intercept their stress response and reset their emotional physiology. The benefits are more open-heartedness, better communication and enhanced problem-solving abilities – all of which we need right now as we navigate through these challenging times."

#### **Saving our Marriage**

Tammy and Reynir Jonsson were on the brink of divorce. Despite their efforts to save their marriage, the stress of finances, raising teenagers and the pressures at work was destroying it. Their biggest issue was strained communications, as it is with many couples. Tammy and Reynir's feelings of hurt, judgment, anger and blame that had accumulated over the years made it impossible for them to communicate effectively.

Tammy says, "Reynir was always angry and I always felt hurt and unappreciated. Whenever we'd try to talk it would end in a screaming match. It got to where we felt like not communicating at all because we knew we'd never see eye-to-eye or resolve anything. It would be like, 'You go to the living room, I'll go to the bedroom and we just won't talk.' This went on for years. We tried everything to fix our marriage but we were at the end of our rope."

Ray Varlinsky, a licensed California Marriage and Family Therapist, certified Gottman Method Therapist and Gottman Couples Workshop Leader, says, "Many couples don't know how to use their emotions. Instead, they're being used *by* their emotions. Emotions can be a valuable resource for couples if they learn how to use them as a signal and learn to disengage from their distressed negative emotions and work with the information within them."

#### **Nurture your Heart Connection:**

Dr. Rozman offers some simple strategies to help couples get their hearts in-sync.

The [Quick Coherence Technique](#)<sup>®</sup> is a scientifically validated three-step exercise. This deceptively simple technique will help you adjust your heart rhythm patterns into coherence.

Quick Coherence Technique:

1. Heart Focus: Shift your attention to the area of the heart and breathe slowly and deeply.
2. Heart Breathing: Keep your focus in the heart by gently breathing – five seconds in and five seconds out – through your heart. Do this two or three times.
3. Heart Feeling: Activate and sustain a genuine feeling of appreciation or care for someone or something in your life. Focus on the good heart feeling as you continue to breathe through the area of your heart.

Additional practices to help revitalize your relationship:

- Set a few minutes each evening to connect with your partner. Share about how your day went. Share about your concerns and fears related to work, finances, etc. The act of sharing with someone who cares about you helps to revitalize feelings of being connected.
- When your partner is talking, practice listening without interruption. Listening from a place of genuine care, even if the issues aren't resolved yet, can provide tremendous release.
- Take a few quiet moments before bed to focus on something about your partner, or something they did, that you really appreciate. Feelings of appreciation have been shown to create more heart rhythm coherence. It's also beneficial for the immune system. Keeping an appreciation journal is also a great practice.
- During breakfast share with your partner what it was that you really appreciated about them or something that they did that left you feeling cared for. You and your partner will both benefit as you engage in feelings of appreciation at the start of your day.

Varlinsky says, "One of the things I suggest to the couples I work with is to use [emWave Personal Stress Reliever](#) (PSR) whenever they feel stressed. Based on HeartMath's research, the concept behind this technology is to engage the heart's powerful rhythms to transform stressful emotions. Whether in session or at home, I ask couples to use the emWave PSR to calm themselves down, self-soothe and reconnect with a positive feeling and with their relationship. From this balanced place, when their heart rhythms are coherent, they can talk about what triggered the feelings that came up and how it made them feel. Because they're in a coherent state, they're much more successful at working through the issues that arise."

Dr. Rozman says, "Stress is a feedback signal that something needs to be adjusted or rebalanced. The good news is that people have much more power over their emotional well-being than they give themselves credit for. They just need a little direction on how to access that power inside themselves to reset their emotions. None of us are immune to stress, but we can choose how we process the stress that is happening around us."

### **Case in Point**

"All these years we've been saying similar things but couldn't hear each other because of the negative emotions we carried around with us. The emotions would stack and the stress would accumulate and that's what entered every conversation we would have," says Tammy. "Now, before a communication we each take a couple minutes to get in coherence. We adjust our heart rhythms, we release the stress, we get our attitudes right and then we communicate. It's amazing what you hear from the other person when you do this."

Reynir added, "Before I learned the HeartMath tools I had a very difficult time managing my anger. I didn't know why I was angry all the time, I just was. Now I'm a lot happier in my life and things are a lot easier to deal with. My interactions with my wife and my kids and in life in general are a lot smoother. Now we can go and do things together we couldn't do before because we'd be fighting and be angry. I've recharged my life, I'm calmer now and I feel much more in control."

Tammy explains, "Nobody teaches you emotions 101. What we've learned to do is so easy, anyone can do it. But if you don't know what to do you just end up a victim of your emotions. These practices have played a critical role in our communications. I realize now that before we were listening to each other but we never really *heard* each other."

Tammy says that in addition to the major improvements in their communications, they've also experienced a rekindling of their romance and reignited the passionate sparkle they had when they first started dating. "Reynir sends me sweet text messages and he'll call me on his lunch hour and say something that just makes my heart flutter. We've reopened our hearts to each other and it feels so good."

Tammy and Reynir say that they've also benefitted from using the emWave Personal Stress Reliever. They use it to help with their communication as well as to prepare for the day ahead. Taking just a couple of minutes to use the emWave PSR to get into coherence before they start their day and again when they get home has significantly reduced the amount of day-to-day stress they experience and greatly enhanced their overall quality of life.

During the month of February HeartMath is offering their *Improving Relationships* e-booklet free of charge. You can download it at [www.heartmath.com/improvingrelationships](http://www.heartmath.com/improvingrelationships). HeartMath founder Doc Childre's *De-Stress Kit for the Changing Times* is always available for free download at [www.heartmath.com/destresskit](http://www.heartmath.com/destresskit). To learn more about the emWave Personal Stress Reliever please visit [www.emwave.com](http://www.emwave.com).

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