

Mutual support in times of stress as central factor for the well-being and satisfaction in close relationships

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Content of the talk:

- Education programs for couples in Europe
- The Couples Coping Enhancement Training (paarlife) of Guy Bodenmann
- Some implications of the outcomes of paarlife



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Marital education programs for couples in Europe

- In general: low implementation rate of effective education programs for couples in Europe
- Religious institutions offer education programs and counseling for couples (which is i.e. the case in Spain, Italy, Belgium, Austria, etc.)
- Religious offers (like marriage-encounter) offer preparation programs for couples for the marriage. They are very much connected to strong religious beliefs about what a marriage should be.



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Evaluated prevention programs for couples in Europe

- In dependence of psychology traditions there exist strong differences in the acceptance of cognitive-behavioral prevention programs for couples
- Implementation rate of PREP: PREP instructors are positioned in England, France, Netherlands, Germany (see the translated programs EPL/KEK/KOMKOM), Hungary, Iceland, Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales, Norway, Poland, Switzerland, Croatia, Czechoslovakia, Greece, Malta, Gibraltar.
- Implementation rate of the programs EPL/KEK/KOMKOM since 1988: 1'650 trainers in Germany (2300 trained couples per year); 200 trainers in other countries, especially Austria, Switzerland
- Implementation of paarlife: 30 trainers in Switzerland, Germany and Italy (1200 trained couples since 1997)



The Couples Coping Enhancement Training (paarlife) of Guy Bodenmann

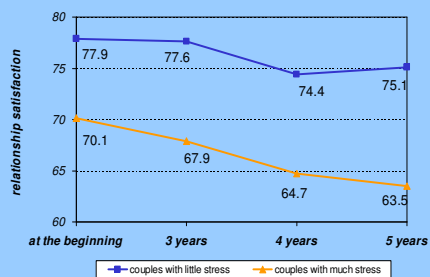
- Evaluated stress prevention program for couples
- Focus on communication, problem solving and especially on **dyadic coping**
- Focus within dyadic coping:
 - Enhancement of stress communication
 - Enhancement of emotional support
 - Correspondence between the level of emotional self-disclosure and support
 - Fairness aspects with regard to emotional support



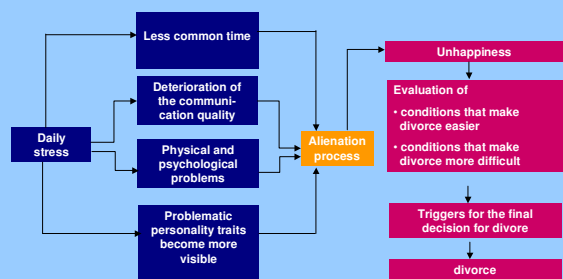
Why this focus on dyadic coping?

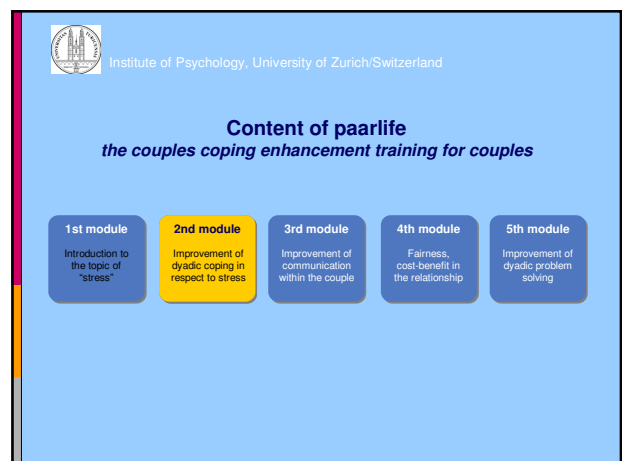
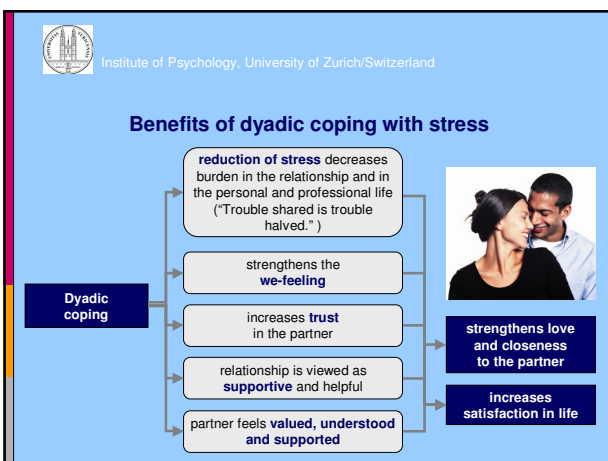
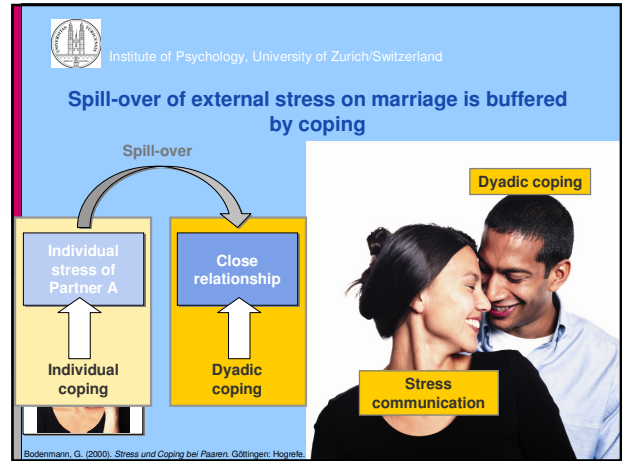
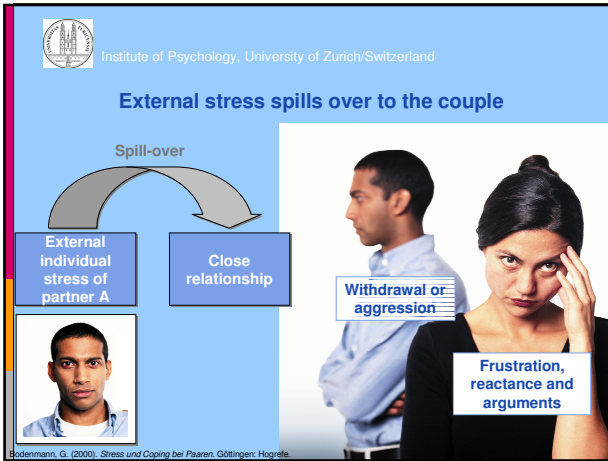


The course of relationship satisfaction depending on stress



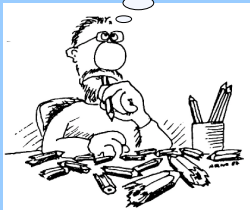
Stress-divorce-model (Bodenmann, 1995, 2000a)







How do we best
communicate
stress?



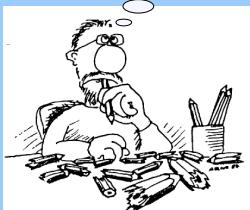
Probability of a response to...

	unsatisfied couples	satisfied couples
... nonverbal stress signal	6%	12%
... verbal stress signal	45%	57%

→ Important: verbal, explicit expression of stress



How do we best
support the
partner?



Some possibilities how to provide support...

emotion-oriented

- show *understanding and compassion*
- *reassure* your partner
- put your partner's faults *into perspective* (it was not all his fault)
- *show solidarity* with your partner's feelings
- show *cohesion* within the couple
- assist in the *reevaluation* of the situation
- help your partner *calm down* (palliation)

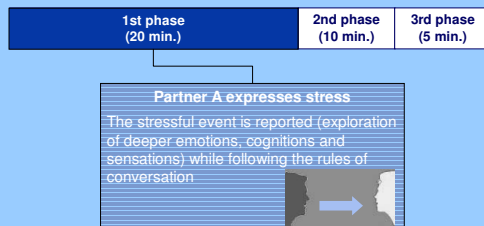
problem-oriented

- specific *assistance* in particular tasks
- give "*advice*"



3-phase-method of dyadic coping with stress

- One **speaker** and one **listener**
- **Three-phase** structure



Rules of the speaker and listener

Speaker

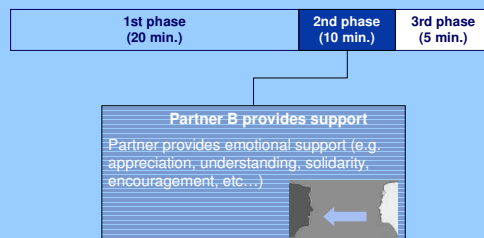
- **Concreteness**
Remain in the specific situation of stress; do not drift off to other topics. Stay in the Here and Now.
- **Self-orientation**
Speak of yourself (thoughts, needs, expectations...).
- **Communication of feelings / meaning of stress**
Explore your feelings and the reason why this situation is stressful.

Listener

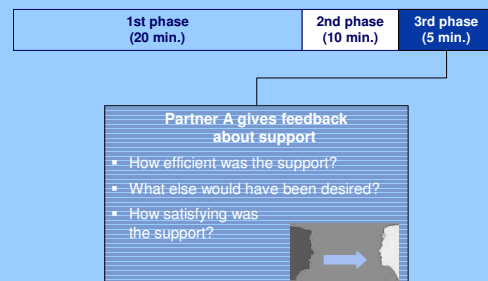
- **Active and interested listening**
Face the speaker, maintain eye contact, nod and give positive feedback.
- **Compassionate, open questions**
Ask compassionate, open questions which help your partner explore the reason for which he/she feels stressed.
- **Summary**
Summarize the content of your partner's statements in your own words (without interpreting).



3-phase-method of dyadic coping with stress



3-phase-method of dyadic coping with stress





Who profits from the training?

- **Women and men**, but women slightly more, **profit from the program** for the improvement of their individual coping, dyadic coping and communication at short term, and in a more moderate way, over the time of one and two year.
- Women report an increase of the partner's **positive support, less hostile** and **less superficial support**. Men do not see any change of women's behaviour at long term



Results with regard to the PFB (relationship quality)

POST	6 MONTHS	1 YEAR	2 YEARS
Women: $d = .60$ Men: $d = .41$	Women: $d = .35$ Men: $d = .21$	Women: $d = .51$ Men: $d = .39$	Women: $d = .42$ Men: $d = .12$



Results with regard to the Supportive Behavior of the partner in the Dyadic Coping Questionnaire

POST	6 MONTHS	1 YEAR	2 YEARS
Women: $d = .68$ Men: $d = .31$	Women: $d = .68$ Men: $d = .22$	Women: $d = .60$ Men: $d = .02$	Women: $d = .60$ Men: $d = .03$



Implications of the results:

- Outcomes highlighten the importance of couples' competences to deal with daily stress for their relationship satisfaction and the course of their close relationship
- As effects fade out over 2 years (like in other education programs for couples), couples would need **continuos coaching offers** or **booster sessions** after any prevention program to maintain the competences



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**Thank you very much
for your attention!**