

Michael Roessle...: We are recording somewhere on the computer. Hello, thanks for joining us for another one of our series of videos here. Today I am joined by my friend Sarah Rattray. Sarah, thank you for joining us.

Sarah Rattray: I'm so glad to be here, Michael.

Michael Roessle...: I wish it were under other circumstances, but we have a pretty important topic to talk about here today. I'm recording about three videos a day and rushing through the normal process of this. I know your background a bit, but I'd like you to just throw out there who you are and what you do and why I would have you here to talk about this subject?

Sarah Rattray: Well, the way that you and I know each other from many years ago is I am an FDN as you are, but I have been a psychologist for 30 years. I'm a couples psychologist. I am really trying to help couples through this time with their communication because this is such a stressful time. We really want safe and supportive communication with each other. That is how I am here to help.

Michael Roessle...: Thank you for that and for the work you're doing. If you've watched any of the other videos you would know that I'm trying to bring in as many different perspectives and helpful information as I possibly can. We've had Dr. Mya on who is an herbalist and an M.D. We had Michael Mackavoy on with some biochemistry stuff. I'm interviewing a or talking to a physician's assistant tonight on everything related to nursing and pregnancy and fertility that's known thus far.

Michael Roessle...: We're just trying to cover things from a bunch of different perspectives. That doesn't always just mean medical perspectives and nutritional perspectives because a lot of people now are going to find themselves in pretty close quarters...

Sarah Rattray: Absolutely.

Michael Roessle...: ... for an extended period of time under high stress with partners with family that might exceed the normal number of hours spent together. If you pour some gasoline of anxiety and stress on that, that can create quite a volatile situation that can be difficult for everyone.

Michael Roessle...: I guess I'll just give you the floor for now and we'll see where it goes, but I think this could be really valuable for a lot of couples out there who are now navigating a both work-from-home situation or both out of work right now situation. The floor is yours and thank you.

Sarah Rattray: Or one or the other working incredibly stressful hours in healthcare facilities.

Michael Roessle...: Or like us, I'm working from home and pretty isolated but Mira is going to the hospital four days a week. That is the last place anybody wants to be.

Sarah Rattray: All these combinations.

Michael Roessle...: All kinds of combinations. We have grocery store workers, thank you. We have postal and fire department. A lot of people are still going to be going out. No matter who is seeing this I think it will be relevant.

Sarah Rattray: Yeah. Michael, I'm sure that your tribe knows all about fight or flight and stress. Something that's probably not very often talked about is what happens in your brain regarding communication when you are stressed, when your body is in fight or flight. You can really imagine when you're in fight or flight the fight part of fight or flight... If I was being attacked by a Saber tooth tiger, I'd pick up rocks and throw them at it. In communication, if I'm in that fight mode what I'm going to throw are weapons of words. I might be critical. I might certainly I'm going to be short tempered but I'm going to be trying to fight with words when my body is in fight or flight and trying to protect my life.

Sarah Rattray: What we all have to understand is our bodies are doing the very best job that it can and our brain is as well. When our hormones tell us you're under attack, you'd better protect yourself from threat, that comes out in how we talk to each other.

Sarah Rattray: The flight part of fight or flight that can come out in avoiding conversation, I need to get away from the danger, and the freeze part. Some people call it fight, flight or freeze. The freeze part can be just shutting down in conversation. An overarching principle that I'm going to be referring to today is how to set up conversations with your partner, with your loved ones, with the people in your home that are as calm and safe as possible. Everything is going to come back around to what can I do, what can we do when we want to talk to keep things as calm and safe as possible.

Sarah Rattray: One of the facets of this situation that we're in is the overwhelming unpredictability of what's going on, and the lack of control that we have. Part of when we're communicating to be as safe and calm as possible is to also build in as much predictability and as much control as possible.

Sarah Rattray: What we want to avoid when we're talking to each other, whether it's a tiny conversation, which I'll touch on, or bigger conversations, we want to avoid surprises, and we want to avoid startling each other.

Sarah Rattray: Even at a good time of life at a regular day, let's say I'm a really writing something, I'm working hard, and my loved one comes over and starts talking to me, and I'm startled. I didn't expect it. I'm interrupted. I'm going to glance over with maybe irritability, or you know just be startled. And it's not a good welcoming frame of mind to initiate a conversation.

Sarah Rattray: At this time, where our baseline is-

Michael Roessle...: Or easily started.

Sarah Rattray: We are easily startled. That's where we're living. The first thing I just want to mention because I'm going to talk more extensively about kind of important conversations is be mindful. If you're reading the news or thinking about something on the news and you want to tell the person who's in the room with you, think a moment what is it that I want to say and really get your eyes on the other person. Are they in the kind of space to

hear it? Here's what you don't want to do. You're reading the news, you're looking at... You don't want to go, "Oh my god, Michael, did you see what just happened?" Now I freaked you out, and you weren't ready for it. And you're like, "What? What? What?" Don't do that.

Sarah Rattray: Just for a little thing, let's say I look at the news, and I'm going to look at you, and I'm going to see what are you doing? And then I might say, "Hey Michael." And if you don't say anything, I'm not going to keep going. "Hey Michael."

Michael Roessle...: Yeah?

Sarah Rattray: Can I share something with you I just saw on the news?

Michael Roessle...: I'd rather not.

Sarah Rattray: Okay. All right. Well, if I can show you later, just let me know, but okay cool.

Sarah Rattray: So that was perfect, Michael. You totally, totally, totally get to say, "I'd rather not." You're protecting yourself. And so we're going to establish this safety between us. I have to take a moment. I see this thing on the news and I want to share it with you. I have to look over at you and say... Get your attention calmly, wait for you to answer me, and ask your permission. And what's more... I might want to ask your permission, can I show you this funny thing that I saw or can I show you this startling thing that I saw so you know what's up.

Sarah Rattray: Anyways, so that's just a tiny little piece of what I wanted to talk about. But again, my goal is to really help you recognize how to set things up between the two of you so things stay calm, safe, predictable, controlled, no surprises, no startling.

Sarah Rattray: Let's suppose that, well actually, I'm going to go on. Any questions before I continue?

Michael Roessle...: I don't think so. I am guilty of vomiting news on Mira many times in the last couple weeks, and I finally learned my lesson yesterday. We have a little garage gym setup at our house, which we just got set up like a month ago, not even knowing anything, and she lifts weights. And it's been a God send because everything's closed. She was in between sets of an exercise, and I just barged in and was like [inaudible 00:09:48]. Sharing because I got off one of these recordings with Brodie Welch, who's an acupuncturist Chinese medicine doctor, and I wanted to share some information from her doctor friends who are in Wuhan and all these things. I was like, "Did you know this, and this, and this, and this, and this, and this?" And then I got a little talking to about when it's appropriate and when it's not to throw that stuff in the middle of the area, and that the gym is her place in the garage where she goes to not be dealing with that. And so I learned it with a little bit of bite back, but it would be nice if people could learn this before they do that to the point of pushing someone to anger. I think that that's really good.

Michael Roessle...: And you mentioned even asking can I show you something funny because if somebody's in a certain type of mood, being shown something funny is not going to be well-received either.

Sarah Rattray: Exactly.

Michael Roessle...: And I know that we're going to want to cheer up people or lighten people's moods, but I know if I'm feeling a certain way and somebody tries to joke with me or show me something funny, it's not very well-received. It goes both ways.

Sarah Rattray: Yeah. Yeah.

Michael Roessle...: I think that'd be it. That's my own frontline story with my wife.

Sarah Rattray: Good. Well, I'm going to pick up on that story, but I want to take just a second to say I'll give you a free gift that I have, a PDF that's going to outline all the things I'm talking about. When people are watching this, don't worry, just about everything is in the guide that Michael will link up for you.

Sarah Rattray: I wanted to pick up on what you said. You said, you used the word vomiting. You said I've been vomiting news. Vomiting is this involuntary spasm that goes through our body, but yet we can exercise control. And so, when you have this impulse, like this vomiting impulse to just talk, can you recognize what it feels like in your body that you're about to talk? And can you dial it back for a minute? Can you say, "I'm about to come up." Most of us can make it to the bathroom before we vomit usually. Can you do that with your words? Can you say, "I'm about to..." And can you dial it back, and think for a minute? Okay, just a second. What do I want to say? And is the other person ready?

Sarah Rattray: Moving on. Becoming aware of what you want to say is really helpful to set up conversation that is safe and predictable, and you will feel more in control when you think it through and prepare, and when you feel more in control, the person you want to talk to will feel that way as well.

Sarah Rattray: I recommend that you prepare by thinking about what is the one thing that you want to focus on talking about in this conversation that you want to have? Pick one thing. Let's not solve the world's problems. Let's talk about the one thing that's on my mind the most. Plan and expect that you're going to have a series of smaller, again, more controlled, predictable conversations to keep it safe. What is the one thing that you want to talk about? Then you want to really, really tune in how are you feeling emotionally about this thing that you want to talk about? What are the feelings that are coming up for you? You want to identify that.

Sarah Rattray: Then next you're going to be coming up with a clear request for the kind of conversation that you want to have. I'm going to give you two examples of kinds of conversations, but in my work I talk about eight different kinds, but two of the kinds of conversations you might want to have are the kind where I just get to share with you my feelings, and you listen to me without solving, without fixing, without contradicting, you just listen to me until I feel heard, and then it'll be your turn to share with me your feelings and I will just listen to you to understand you and your perspective, and I'm not going to try to fix it. That's one kind of conversation.

Sarah Rattray: Another kind of conversation might be how do... what should we do based on our different feelings about something? Suppose there are two different kinds of conversations we might have, but also what are your clear requests for your goals in the

conversation? Like I want to feel encouraged when we're done, or I want to feel really loved when we're done, or I want to feel like we're on the same team. Get in your mind what is it that you want to get out of the conversation.

Sarah Rattray: Then, and this is all in your head or you can maybe jot it down, but this is all preparing to talk to your loved one. Then you want to think about when is the last time you had a conversation that resembles this that went really well? Where you really appreciated your partner. You might think, you know, oh, Michael, I remember a couple of weeks ago when I was asking you about recommendations for [inaudible 00:15:19]. And you were really helpful. I really liked the way you listened to me, and you honored me, and you were respectful. I'd like to have that kind of conversation again today because that felt really good. You want to think about a time you had a similar kind of conversation where you appreciated your loved one.

Sarah Rattray: And then finally, think to yourself, knowing your schedule, knowing your family member's schedule, when is a good time for us to talk where our energy will be the best, where we won't be interrupted, where we won't be distracted, and where in our home, if we can go out, like at a park or something, where can we go where we're going to feel safe and calm?

Sarah Rattray: That's all the stuff you want to think through in your head. I'm going to go onto the next step, but any comments or anything at this point, Michael?

Michael Roessle...: No, I'm just taking notes. And I'm on mute, so I'm going to be a little slow. There's some stuff happening outside that's loud, so I'm leaving... I'm going to be a little slow to respond just in case.

Michael Roessle...: No, I don't think so. I'm just taking a little notes for myself and it's all pretty clear to me.

Sarah Rattray: Okay, so next step, you want to set up this conversation with your partner or with your loved one. Similar to what I was saying a few minutes ago, you want to start by getting your partner's attention. When I'm talking about getting our partner's attention, don't call to them from the next room. Hey Michael! Hey Michael! Don't do that. You don't know what they're doing and again, that's a kind of startling thing. You want to go to the same room that the person is in, you want to look at them. What are they doing? Does it look like a moment that you could get their attention? If they're writing frantically, or studying, or looking very deep in thought, you might not want to get their attention at that moment.

Sarah Rattray: If it looks could be a good time, I recommend you just say the person's name. I did this a few minutes ago. You could say something like, "Hey Michael?"

Michael Roessle...: Yes.

Sarah Rattray: Thanks. Michael, I wanted to talk. Do you have a sec?

Michael Roessle...: Sure.

Sarah Rattray: Okay. That's a great way to get someone's attention. You say their name. If they don't respond, don't keep talking. Maybe you say their name a second time. If you

think they didn't hear you, if they had their headphones on and they're listening to music, maybe you go and tap them on the shoulder. But if they don't acknowledge you, don't keep talking. That tells you they're not ready to hear what you have to say. Again, the principle is don't surprise them. Don't startle them. Make it safe and calm. If they're really in the middle of a project and they don't stop and say yes, come back a little bit later.

Sarah Rattray: Let's say you finally come back and as Michael did, you say, "Hey Michael." You say the name of the person, and they say, "Yes?" You say, "Do you have a sec?" Now, if your partner comes to you and says to you, "Do you have a sec?" If you do, say, "Sure." If you don't, here's a lovely way to say you don't have a second. Say, "I would love to talk to you." So first, say yes. "I would love to talk to you, but can you come back in about 10 minutes?" Or, "I'd love to talk to you, but I'm in the middle of this thing. It's going to take me an hour." A lovely way to say no is to start by saying yes to whatever you can say yes to. I really want to hear what you have to tell me, but I can't do it right now.

Sarah Rattray: But you know, so let's say they say yes. They are ready to hear. Say... Now you're ready with what you wanted to talk about, so remember I asked you before to prepare by thinking what's the one thing that you want to talk about. How do you feel about it? What is your clear request? And remember I said, "What do you appreciate about your partner or your loved one from a past time?" Let's say I'm talking to Michael, and he says yes, he has a sec. I might say, "Hey Michael, remember that time a couple weeks ago I was asking you about Solennium. I really appreciated how you," let's say, "How you took me seriously, and we had such a really lovely, respectful conversation. I want to have a conversation like that again because I felt really good after talking to you. So right now what's on my mind..."

Sarah Rattray: And now I'm going to talk about the one thing, and I'm going to say, let's say for example I'm really nervous about my mother who has asthma, and I'm really scared. What I'm wondering is, and now here's my clear request, what do I want to do? I want to sit down and talk with you. I just kind of want to share with you my fears about my mother, and what I really want you to do is just I really want you to listen. You don't need to fix anything. I don't need reassurance. But I just really need you to hear me.

Sarah Rattray: Now I've given you, I've told you exactly what I need from you. And then I'm going to ask you for a time and place, so I might say, "So when's a good time for us to do this? I was sort of thinking maybe tonight after dinner or whatever. How about you? When's a good time do you think that we could sit down and talk for a bit?" And we'll talk about that time. And then I'm going to say, "Well, and let's pick a place where we feel really kind of safe and comfortable and cozy." I love it when we go outside and sit on the bench. How about you? And we just negotiated. And now we're set.

Sarah Rattray: Now, what I tell couples all the time is let's say we pick tomorrow at 2:00. I recommend you get out your calendar on your phone or your paper calendar, and you literally make an appointment. You better actually have an actual appointment because when you and your partner want to have a safe, calm, predictable conversation, you want to be able to count on it and rely on it.

Sarah Rattray: If it's any time in the future, get out your calendar and make that appointment. And then let's say it's in an hour, we don't have to make a phone appointment. A

few minutes before you sit down to talk, do something relaxing. Michael, knowing you, you and your tribe have probably talked about any number of ways to relax. Whatever is relaxing for you, whether it's meditation, or breathing, or tapping, or a sauna, whatever is relaxing for you, take a few minutes, 20 minutes is ideal, but even just take a few minutes and get yourself into a calm, relaxed place. If you can think about gratitude and appreciation, that's ideal.

Michael Roessle...: Thanks for the heads up. I should get a tapping video. That's one I forgot. We have several experts around, so. Yeah, we talked quite a bit about nervous system calming, and both from a physiological medicine standpoint of your immune system works better when your body is calm, but also from a just functional living your life, not from a panic state standpoint too. We've talked, we did a little breathing exercise qi gong yesterday.

Sarah Rattray: Oh nice.

Michael Roessle...: And I'm having one my, the founder of the... I'm in a two-year training called Luminous Awareness Institute, and the founder of that school is a pretty world renown meditation teacher, and she's going to come on, do a guide of meditation, and teach some really powerful presence holding peer-to-peer space holding support techniques that we're learning in the training that we're to use with clients, but she's going to teach it as a take home for people to be able to, like you said, there's times where the partner doesn't need to hear anything, or they won't want to hear anything, where they just want to be heard. And so, we're going to do a whole video on that too, on practices that are effective for calm space holding and presence. We're trying to get the whole gamut of nervous system down regulation a little bit, and the tapping is great. We also talked about heart math a little bit too.

Sarah Rattray: Perfect. All of that. Michael, there's something about having a partner who lives in your house with you, and you might think, "Well, we don't need this stuff. Why don't we just start talking?" But everything that you just said, Michael, all of the reasons to calm down our nervous systems, we also need that with our partners, we need that to communicate.

Sarah Rattray: I was telling you earlier what happens in your brain in fight or flight, here are the things that are accessible when you relax that are inaccessible when you're in fight or flight. Empathy and compassion are only accessible when you're relaxed. When you're freaking out, you don't have empathy and compassion. Creative problem solving is only accessible when you're relaxed. When you're in fight or flight, problem solving involves which weapon can I throw that's most effective? You're going to problem solve that fabulously.

Michael Roessle...: Yeah, and it's now. It's not the ability to think future wise is not present.

Sarah Rattray: Yeah. The whole gamut of the creative problem solving, it's unavailable. But it is available when you're calm. Another thing is just the ability to listen with curiosity and interest. If I'm in fight or flight when I'm listening, I'm listening for how to rebut you, right? If Michael says tapping's great [inaudible 00:26:16]. Oh yeah? Well, meditation's better because you know, I'm in fight or flight, and I'm listening so that I can attack you and refute you.

Sarah Rattray: When I'm calm, I can listen with curiosity and interest, and like oh, and I can be very open. Well that's really interesting. I never thought about that. Those are the attitudes that come from your body being in a relaxed state in the way they express in conversation.

Michael Roessle...: That all makes sense too, like functionally. If you are in a danger state, empathy and compassion is not the thing that's going to be the best for survival from an evolutionary standpoint. These skills aren't needed in an actual animal attacking you thinking happening, and we just hijacked that system. It's not evil, it's not bad, it's not wrong. It's the body's natural response to something that is a threat or it perceives as a threat.

Michael Roessle...: I had a bunch of people, like I suck at that, or I'm really bad at that, or I suck because I'm so anxious and all these things, and it's like no, this is a legitimately anxiety provoking thing. It's literally a scary situation. And but you're safe right now. And that's the big thing is you're safe right now. And that the body doesn't know that. And so the fact that it gets rid of creative problem solving, inability to listen with interest, and empathy and compassion, it's not good bad or otherwise, it's just a natural thing that happens, and it's not bad. I just want to make people, or encourage people not to judge themselves if they catch themselves in a state like that because I've seen some of that. It's a natural thing for the body to do, and it's appropriate at times.

Sarah Rattray: Well, Michael I want to take that even one step further. You said you don't need empathy and compassion. If you're in fight or flight, if you're fighting for your life, it's literally dangerous to have empathy and compassion. You could die, so pick through this.

Michael Roessle...: Because of hesitation and things like that, yeah.

Sarah Rattray: Exactly. Exactly. If I'm a cave woman and a saber tooth tiger jumps in front of my cave, and I think, "Aw, you look so hungry." I hesitated, I'm dead. It's literally, my brain will not allow it. I agree with you 100%.

Michael Roessle...: And that's how we got here.

Sarah Rattray: Yep, we survived long enough. And one other thing that's not accessible in fight or flight is a sense of humor. All the things that you just said are again true. Don't put yourself down because you don't have a sense of humor when you're in fight or flight. It's a dangerous thing to... Humor takes a certain, like when you're thinking about a joke, you go like this. That's dangerous. You need to be zeroed in on the threat. Michael, everything you said, I really agree with and take it to the extreme. Your brain does not allow you to do these things when you're in fight or flight because you could die.

Sarah Rattray: So again, we want to be as relaxed as possible, and when we're relaxed, all these wonderful things open up to us. We're open to creative problem solving. Our sense of humor is there. We can listen with interest and curiosity, and we have empathy and compassion available to us.

Sarah Rattray: I want you to think about something, Michael, while I go on and talk. You know the difference in how you feel when you're getting into that flight or fight state.



You've experienced what it's like in your body to be in fight or flight. And you've experienced what it's like in your body to just be totally chill and fine. When you start to sit down with your partner, let's say we've agreed to talk at 4:00, and now it's 4:00, and I'm feeling pretty chill. A little piece of my mind needs to be monitoring me in case I start getting into fight or flight. I want to be aware of that.

Sarah Rattray: Let's say we've agreed and you're going to be listening to me talk about my mother with asthma and my fears, and you're going to be listening. You have to keep a little monitor on yourself. If you start feeling your body going into fight or flight, like you got triggered thinking about your mother or something, you need to say, "Hey. Hey Sarah, can you give me a minute? I need to calm myself down. I'm getting a little worked up." You have to speak up because if you let that keep building, all those lovely things we were going to talk about are going to start to shut down. Your ability to listen, your empathy and compassion, all of that is going to start to shut off. We want to be keeping an eye on ourselves, and we want to speak up and say, "I need to take a break for a sec."

Sarah Rattray: Okay, so what I'm talking about now is one kind of conversation when I just want to be heard and I don't want any fixing, the pattern I love, and I love this pattern for a lot of kind of conversations, is just a speaker listener pattern where when I'm the speaker, I'm doing the speaking. Kind of like I'm doing now, Michael. You're just really quietly listening. But the listener's job is to listen to me so that you can track what I'm saying, so you can tell me that you're hearing what I'm saying, so that you can hear it from my perspective.

Sarah Rattray: As I kind of mentioned earlier, your job is not to cleverly think about what you want to say about it or to rebut it, or to have an opinion about it at all. Your job is just to listen to me enough so that you know what I'm saying. If I say to you, "Gosh, you know, Michael, I am scared about my mother. She has asthma and she keeps going out to the store. I'm really, really scared." I want you to say a little tiny brief summary of what you heard me say. Give that a try right now, Michael.

Michael Roessle...: To summarize what you just said? In which...

Sarah Rattray: Summarize what I said about my mother. What did you hear me say about my mother? My fear?

Michael Roessle...: I actually got put into my own fear.

Sarah Rattray: Wow. Yeah, so this is perfect. If you're not tracking me, if I say to you, "What did you hear me say?" And you're like, "I don't know. I got into my own fear." Let's take a minute. I don't want to keep telling-

Michael Roessle...: Then I just started combining what you were saying with what I was thinking with... then it kind of merges into one fear based reaction.

Sarah Rattray: We want to keep things slow and safe, and I don't want to be, if you have something going on in your head, I don't want to keep talking and talking while you're over there combining fears. If I check in with you, tell me what you're hearing me say, and

you're like, "Sorry, I went off somewhere else." Let's take... And we're not going to do it now because we're recording this, but [crosstalk 00:34:20].

Michael Roessle...: Yeah, but then it would be kind of a reboot, and a grounding, and a restart from the beginning of the conversation.

Sarah Rattray: Yes. And I'm going to check in with you, and I'm going to wait for you tell me, "Okay, I'm here. I'm ready." Or I'm going to check in with you, you feeling ready? Or something like that.

Sarah Rattray: Let's do this again. Michael, I wanted to share with you some of my fears about my mom. Do you think you can listen right now?

Michael Roessle...: Yes.

Sarah Rattray: Okay. I'm really worried about my mom because she has asthma and she keeps going out to the store, and I am really scared, and I know when she goes out to the store she picks up the things and she puts them back down. I know that about my mom, and I'm really worried. I just want to make sure we're all on in sync. Tell me what you heard me say. Can you do that, please?

Michael Roessle...: That you're scared that your asthmatic mother keeps going to the store and touching all the things.

Sarah Rattray: Yes. Yes. That's exactly right. Thank you Michael, you heard me. Thank you. We're going to just... That's all you have to say because now, I mean, I'm like... Already, I feel much better because you... This is what happened. I said some words. You heard them in your ears. You said them back to me, and my nervous system just went like this. I feel connected to you. I feel so relieved. And now I'm going to tell you some more things. And every once and a while, I want to pause and say, "What are you hearing?" Or you jump in and say, "Give me a sec. I want to tell you what I'm hearing you say."

Sarah Rattray: Then at the end of it, what it's great for the listener to do is to say something like, so if Michael, if you're the listener, I'm the speaker, for you to say, "Sarah, if I was in your shoes, Sarah's shoes, it sure makes sense to me that you'd be worried. If I was you, I'd be worried too." That's called validation. It has nothing to do with you if you agree with me or if you believe me, or anything. But now that you heard me talk about my fear, you say if you, Michael, was seeing it through Sarah's eyes, that perspective sure makes sense. I can see how you're feeling that way. Do you want to give that a very quick try or do you want me to move on?

Michael Roessle...: I think people get it. I think we can move on. Yeah, this one, I've done enough therapy to know the rules on that one too. Like I know the value of it, and that was something I had to learn that didn't come natural. It wasn't part of my communication skills.

Sarah Rattray: Michael, it doesn't come naturally to almost anyone. There's an artificial quality to it. It's not the way that we talk. Usually, you tell me a thing, I tell you a thing. You tell me a thing, I tell you a thing. That's what we're doing. But when we want to stay slow, and calm, and safe, we want to feel, you know things are predictable and controlled, we want to

try something more structured like this. That's all it takes, and you will watch the person telling you just... you'll see the relief on their body when you have heard them and told them that what they said just makes sense. And then you're going to switch. I want to hear what's on your mind, and you might not be, we're not going to talk about your view on my mother unless you want to, but you might talk about your fears about your cousin or something like that. And I'm going to listen to you, and I'm going to tell you what I hear you say, and I'm going to tell you if it makes sense what you're saying, you know from your perspective, it really makes sense.

Sarah Rattray: If something comes up and we want to follow up on it, I recommend we not follow up right now because we want to talk about one thing at a time. Let's say you want to suggest something that I should do with my mother. You might say, "Hey, Sarah. Let's set a time for another conversation where we can maybe brainstorm ideas." We want to stay, you know, like I've been saying, controlled and predictable. We finished our one conversation where we're hearing each other. Let's not now tumble into a totally new conversation. Let's take a break, regroup, do something else, and then reintroduce the next conversation.

Sarah Rattray: Michael, how much time, how much more time?

Michael Roessle...: I think this has been great. I think this is a ton for... I've done a lot of therapy, and there were even new things in here for me. I think if someone hasn't, this is a pretty good starting place for conversation. And if, you know, if I get feedback that people want more, we can talk some more about more things. I do have to do another recording pretty shortly.

Michael Roessle...: One thing I'd love your opinion on is so there's a lot going on right now. There's a lot of scary things to talk about. There's just objectively, that's a fact. What I've kind of realized during this conversation is that it's, we're in social isolation, but we have the internet. We have Zoom, we have Skype, we have things like this. The person in your home with you may not be the best person to have every conversation with, and they may not be in the same place as you are around certain subjects, topics, and things like that, and it's totally okay, I think, to have someone else be an outlet because it's not good to hold things in and not say them to anyone if they're on your mind and they're worrying you or bothering you. But that person doesn't necessarily have to be the one person that's in your home or the two people that are in your home. And I think, I don't know what your opinion on that would be.

Michael Roessle...: I'm all for open communication with everyone. I think that's great. But in times like this, I think that there's some people that are wired differently than others as far as being able to handle certain levels of this kind of pretty hard to wrap mind around information. And so, I think one thing I'm going to personally work on is finding more outlets for certain types of conversations then... Because Mira's going to be at the hospital. I don't need to tell her anything about what's going on. The last thing she wants to hear about when she comes home from work is something to do with COVID-19.

Sarah Rattray: Yeah. Well, so let me say at least two, maybe three thing about that. Remember I was saying pick one topic to talk about. I recommend you have a one topic conversation about what conversations do we want to have with each other. Don't make this decision all by yourself. Talk to your partner. Talk to your loved one and say, "I'm kind of

thinking that maybe there are certain kind of conversations we don't want to share with each other. Is that true? Would you rather that I save my COVID-19 conversations with other people?" That maintains the intimacy and trust. Don't decide for her, but definitely, absolutely sit down and have a conversation. What kind of things might we want to share with other people?

Sarah Rattray: Now, a second thing that I want to say kind of about this, but it's hugely important for relationships in general is conversations about your partner only happen with your partner. Do not start talking about your partner to other people. Certainly, you can say to me, "My partner is at the emergency room and I'm scared." Yeah, you can tell me that. But the intimate things about your relationship, be sure you bring them up with your partner. That is what happens in an intimate and safe relationship.

Sarah Rattray: And one other thing I wanted to say about what I've been talking about today is the goal of understanding that whatever kind of conversation you have, keep in mind the first goal is to understand each other, and that's a slower paced conversation. We don't have to solve the problems of the world. That can feel very tense. But when we understand each other, the feeling between the two of us, the feeling in the house is so much more calm and connected.

Michael Roessle...: I welcome all of those suggestions around that. Yes. If the conversation that you feel might not be best with your partner is about your partner, it probably should be with your partner and not with your friend, or your cousin, or your coworker. I just, I want to be mindful of people's boundaries, and I guess you don't learn their boundaries unless you discuss the boundaries.

Sarah Rattray: I love it.

Michael Roessle...: Because we tend to project what we think their boundaries might be or not be. And then almost get offended when it doesn't match our projection that we created. This is me projecting my own experiences on everybody else, but that's something I've encountered where I just assumed that Mira would or wouldn't want to talk about something. And I never asked. And sometimes, more often than not, my assumptions are not correct. And so I think that open communication, like, "Hey, is this topic okay? Or what are the safe topics for us to talk about? And when?"

Michael Roessle...: For us specifically, we do have conversations around this COVID-19 in the daytime, and we don't blast it first thing in the morning, but we do have them in the daytime. She works 3:00 to 11:00 PM. We're trying, other than how was your shift and how was work, we're not going into COVID news when she gets home from an eight hour shift in the emergency room because our goal here in this house when she arrives home, we have a whole little protocol set up for her to clothes in the laundry, shower, washing, scrubbing. We have a whole bunch of things like that, But then everybody needs to calm down because that's going to be a very high stress environment and she's also recovering from autoimmune flair, and mold toxicity, and things like that where sleep is a huge priority for her, and so going from super tense right to bed is not good. And a lot of these conversations might not be the best right before bed. And so that's our home strategy of like timing during the day and safe spaces for certain topics.

Sarah Rattray: Yeah, so Michael, that's beautiful, and there is an enormous space for... Excuse me, for you to be sensitive to her needs and anticipate her needs, but at the same time, you're absolutely right. Making assumptions about each, you may be making the wrong assumption, and you're far from alone, Michael. That is so common. In virtually every couple, we make assumptions. I know they don't want to talk about that, but I never actually did ask them.

Michael Roessle...: Or they might have got upset about something once, and so we assume that that's like a hard and fast rule. That's something else I've also learned and struggled with is my mind has this photographic memory. I think it's kind of a trauma response and an adaption thing of hyper vigilance and knowing that action provided this response. That action provided this response. And then my brain can make this whole catalog of don't say this, don't do this, do this, don't say this, but it's black and white. And so much isn't black and white.

Sarah Rattray: And it's for your protection.

Michael Roessle...: Yeah, yeah. And so much isn't black and white. So just this constant checking in, constant what's okay, what's not, when is it okay, when is it not? Are you safe right now? Is this safe right now? Where's your mood at? These are great. I think that this is a super valuable resource, and yeah, really, really great stuff. I'm really grateful for you sharing all this.

Michael Roessle...: I've experienced many of these things along the last few years, like working really well, not just in this specific situation, but these are great pieces of advice for any couple in any level of communication. And this is a really valuable resource, so... And you said we got a PDF that we can link below the video, so I'll get that from you and we can put a link below where this video will be. We're going to get it transcribed so people can read it. I'll put a link there to your website as well.

Michael Roessle...: Do you do virtual couples counseling?

Sarah Rattray: No.

Michael Roessle...: No. Okay.

Sarah Rattray: I am going to be offering workshops and webinars specifically for this time for dealing with all this stress. I'm going to be offering online programs. But my private practice is currently closed, and it's only for in-person in Seattle, so that's a little bit [crosstalk 00:48:39].

Michael Roessle...: No worries. Under normal circumstances, these are all details I would have known before we hopped on, but things are a little frantic right now.

Sarah Rattray: No problem. No problem.

Michael Roessle...: We'll put a link to your site. We'll put a link to the PDF. This is super valuable, and I really, really appreciate it. And I took this many notes just on my own for things that I'm going to be more mindful of.

Sarah Rattray: I love it.

Michael Roessle...: These are, all right, so I've recorded five videos in the last three days, and I have all my notes that I'm turning into action steps for myself.

Sarah Rattray: I love it.

Michael Roessle...: To be completely honest with everybody, these videos are just as much for me as they are for you. And I just feel I have access to all these wonderful people, and I shouldn't be the only one getting the information.

Sarah Rattray: Yeah, well Michael-

Michael Roessle...: We're getting [crosstalk] as much as possible.

Sarah Rattray: Yeah, thank you for being the leader that you are. You are such a trustworthy source of information and such a trustworthy nexus for experts. I always know that when you are interested in a person that they are someone worth listening to, so thank you so much for all you do.

Michael Roessle...: Thank you. And we'll do this again soon, and hopefully under other circumstances.

Sarah Rattray: We'll do it whenever. Take good care of you and your whole family.

Michael Roessle...: You too.