

## **Relationships and why we need them, through the lens of psychology and family science**

### **Cate Zenzen**

In the midst of a global pandemic, many of us are beginning to realize what really matters. This increase of time spent at home, without the distractions of our usually busy lives, can be a time of real reflection. It can also be a time of stress, anxiety or loneliness, and this influx of emotion has taught us that we need connection with others. So how can we foster relationships with our family, friends, roommates and significant others in this time of isolation? And why is this network so important?

My name is Cate Zenzen and welcome to Bison Talk.

### **CZ**

I'm here today with Katie Spirko, assistant professor of Psychology, and Hunter Stanfield, assistant professor of Family Science to talk about relationships, particularly in a time of isolation.

Thank you both for joining me today.

### **Dr. Hunter Stanfield**

Happy to be here.

### **Dr. Katie Spirko**

It's our pleasure, my pleasure.

### **CZ**

Tell me about your backgrounds. Why did you choose to study in the fields of Psychology and Family Science? Katie, why don't you go first.

### **KS**

I started out, I think, pre-med and then took a psychology class, really liked it and switched. I started working in pediatric settings with kids, and eventually made my way up through the lifespan. By training, I'm a neuropsychologist and my fellowship is in geriatric neuropsychology. I've gone the whole lifespan and I think it gives me a unique perspective on working with families. When you go from kids to working with people who are at the end of their life and talking about their big regrets or the

things that meant the most to them, it gives you retrospective perspective, as people look back on what really matters and what doesn't.

With teaching, I guess, my background, I teach abnormal psychology and social psychology, statistics, some other psychology classes here and there. I think those are the central ones that I do semester after semester. A lot of my work is in assessment, but I do some therapy as well, and the therapy that I do is almost exclusively family therapy. I don't carry a large therapy load, but the ones I do, it's family therapy, and a lot of it's families that are dealing with trauma and grief.

## **HS**

I could probably say I chose family science, because it, kind of, chose me. I had a lot of pseudo counselor type roles from college on, whether that was a resident advisor, peer educator, admissions counselor, camp counselor, working with students and student affairs, and as a community mediator. I was drawn to, in many ways, the idea of working with others trying to navigate difficult life situations. Life's going up, great, life's going down well, what do we need to do to best do that?

The realm of family science particularly though, because there's a lot of different ways to help people, like what Dr. Spirko was just talking about, is a very important way of helping people in the assessment and treatment of what they're going through. Family science is kind of like one of the pronged approaches, and it's relationship focused.

I love it, because it's multidisciplinary. I get to work with researchers, I get to work with people in policy, I get to work with teachers, I get to work with people who are advocates, I get to work with therapists. It's also evidence based, meaning that we're not just, 'I wonder if this,' but we've done a rigorous process to try to figure out how to best help people. We can set aside some old ways of doing things and say, 'Here's what we know now.' It's also strengths focused, meaning I want to help people think about what they do well, and how they can continue doing that. While it can include therapy, which is kind of like an intervention into what's currently going on for somebody, an individual, couple or family, family science is also prevention focused. Which is taking a look at, if we know that parents may be experiencing fill-in-the-blank with their child whenever they're a teenager, what would it be like to give them the tools to manage that well before that challenge gets there? We try to come at it with this

prevention focus and I like that approach too. But we need everybody along the way. We need people to do prevention, intervention, and then you've got like, 'How do you handle crisis situations?' That's kind of why I fell into the world of family science.

At Lipscomb, I teach classes about families and relationships. Many students want to go on and do therapy or counseling, some want to go work in advocacy or policy, and then some want to do the prevention stuff, like 'I would much rather work with premarital couples.' Or, 'I may want to work with families, early parents or later in life, grandparents raising grandchildren,' which is another big one right now.

**CZ**

Sounds like we have a very holistic viewpoint today. I'm looking forward to hearing what you both have to say. We'll start with a very broad question. Why are relationships important?

**KS**

Really, why aren't relationships important?

I think, and this isn't unique to humans, but humans are innately social beings. It's hard to even know who we are outside of the context of our relationships. When we look at our own view of ourselves, what matters to us, finding meaning in our lives, finding purpose, it's very hard to disentangle what we call intra-personal versus inter-personal characteristics or factors. Because so much of who we are, what we do and what we find meaning in has to do with how we relate to others and what those relationships look like. From really infancy on, attachment is so foundational to being secure, being safe.

We need people, you cannot exist by yourself. Physically, mentally, emotionally, you need other people. Learning how to navigate that need and provide for that need and other people at the same time to feel like you're contributing value to your world, as well as finding the security and knowing you have other people to meet those needs is just, it's so central, that it's really built into the fabric of our beings.

**HS**

I would echo much of what Katie, Dr. Spirko, said. I think of relationships as the foundation for how we get through life, or the lubricant in difficult situations that helps us if we feel stuck get some traction and get going. But we know that relationships, good relationships in particular, are protective factors for a lot of health-related issues or stressors that people may be feeling.

When there's the absence of relationships or good relationships we know that people are thrown for a loop. We know that, like Dr. Spirko was talking about, early childhood relationships are formative and foundational for how people may be or may not be, what they may experience or may not experience later on in life. In my work with couples, I tell them that, there are only things you're going to learn about yourself when you are in this type of relationship with another person. I can think that I'm by myself and doing great, but there's a lot that I'm probably missing out on about growth, development and experiencing life if I'm just a lone wolf out there doing it on my own. Relationships, too, I think are at the heart of being a person of faith. You really do need to be in relationships with other people so that you can experience the wide range of human experience; the good, the bad, the ugly, and everything in between. Being with family, being with friends, co-workers, neighbors, it's just an integral part of everything that we do as human beings. Like Dr. Spirko was saying, you can't escape it.

**CZ**

Absolutely. I appreciate you both taking such a broad question. Let's even consider it from the different levels of relationships.

Hunter, as the expert in family connection, what are some of the variances between familial relationships and friendships, or even that of a roommate?

What needs to these connections fill in our lives?

**HS**

All of the above are important. At different points in our lives any one of those categories, classifications probably mean a little bit more than the other, but it's going to ebb and flow. For college students right now, it may primarily be their roommates or their peers, maybe interactions with professors as mentors, co-worker relationships. But it also doesn't take away that early family relationships are there from the start, and they're always going to be there as well. Overall, I think at the

core of all that, we're really looking for two things; one, am I cared for and known, and two, am I able to care for others and know others?

In general, family relationships are, for most of us, ones that we don't get to choose. Families serve as the foundation for how we think about ourselves and the world around us. There's a whole level of intimacy and connection that exists for family relationships, as compared to friendships.

On the flip side, though, for friendships, we often get to choose who we're friends with based off any number of factors. If I do an honest assessment of my friends, they're probably people that are like me in a lot of ways. We have the same interests, look the same way, similar life experiences, and in that sense, it can be comforting to have people that are like me. But with friendships, we get to maybe do something a little bit different. If I'm in a relationship with someone it allows me to see the world differently. With our friendships, who we choose can open up our world experience. There are other things that go on outside of just my little sliver of life. I can choose friends that can help me see things from a different perspective. In fact, good friends are those that can do the mic drop moments with us, so to say, and stick with us in those. They're going to be able to point out things like, 'Hey, Hunter, you really messed up there, let's figure that out and get back on track.' There's a whole other level of intimacy with our friends that we can develop that is fundamentally different than family, but we need all of it. We need all of these connections at all points in our lives.

**CZ**

Absolutely. There's even that accountability aspect to it where, 'I know you; you know me, we can be real with each other.' Definitely.

Katie, you were talking earlier about how relationships are our sense of security. How do you think that translates into being part of a community? Why is it important to feel like you belong somewhere?

**KS**

It's a mix, I think what I was talking about before is that safety and security of knowing you have people that you can depend on and that when you need something they're going to be there for you, balanced with the sense of industry that we all need. Where we need to feel like we matter, we mean something,

and we have a sense of purpose. As much as we need people to be there for us, we also need to be needed by other people and to be contributing.

Being part of a community is going to serve both those purposes. Where we have that security that, if I need, whatever it may be, I can reach out, I have someone who cares for me, I have someone who's going to be there for me. At the same time, I'm a person who has worth and value in that I can contribute this to other people, and I have a role. It helps establish our sense of identity and gives us a mirror that we can look at.

As kids, I think this is why teachers are often so important as community members to children. Before you really have your sense of self you don't know really who you are, you're learning from other people. You're getting that feedback from other people of what you're like, what you're good at, what value you serve to other people. That constant feedback you're getting from other people within that community is helpful to further cement and develop what that role is. What you're good at, what you can do to serve your community, what you can do to get that validation. That, 'Oh, you're talented in this area, or you have a special skill in this area, you're unique in this area.'

Being part of a community helps you understand what's unique about you and special about you, as well as understanding what bonds you to other people or what's similar between you and other people. Then it also gives you practice on what we call repairing ruptures in relationships. When you're part of a community, and you're a member of that community and there's some stability to it, relationships aren't always easy. There's always going to be something that's going to happen at some point in that relationship where there's a disagreement, there's an argument, there's a misunderstanding. Being part of a community you're, in a sense, stuck in that relationship where you can't just escape it when something goes wrong. It teaches you how to navigate through that disruption, that rupture that we call it, and come to an amends where there's a healing process. You can fix something once it's broken, and that's an important part of relationships, an important part of a community.

Hunter might speak to this at some point, but a couple that never has an argument, that's not necessarily a good sign because it's unrealistic. It's not even the goal to just get along all the time perfectly and see eye to eye in everything, because there's not as much growth to that. When you're in a community,

you're going to have disagreements, you're going to have problems that arise and learning how to navigate those problems without discarding the relationship is a skill that we all need to develop that our community teaches us how to do.

## **CZ**

This year, we certainly felt the implications of a lack of community. In March of this year, Lipscomb students went on spring break and just didn't return to campus. We spent the rest of the semester apart using online platforms like Zoom to communicate and to continue our classes.

How do you think this lack of community, particularly in a university, impacted Lipscomb students and even faculty?

## **HS**

In many ways at Lipscomb, what students get to experience is such a good community. It's not perfect, but on a lot of different levels it is a pretty good community to experience, as part of a college experience, at least. Students and their families, and staff were all, yes, impacted, but when you've got a good community in place, it can be a buffer against what we did go through last March and what we're continuing to go through. The fact that I know the stories of my students, personally, I can be looking out for them and saying, 'Hey, what resources do you need?'

I've had previous students get back in touch with me and say, 'Hey, I'm looking for some resources in this area, do you know of anybody that I can connect with?' You need to start building community really before you need it, and at Lipscomb we start that from day one with students, and for those that have been around for years they have had that developed.

For everyone, I think, because of the type of community that we do have here where we're trying to not just meet the head needs of students, but the heart needs of everyone in the community and do that as best we can. It's a different type of experience when you go through something that we have been going through since March. Whereas others that I've spoken to across the country at other institutions, they're like, 'I feel like no one's really reached out or connected with me, I don't know what's going on, I don't know what's going on with my students, I hope they show up.' It's just a different perspective.

I wanted to be there at graduation with my students and celebrate with them as they walked across the stage. I wanted students that had their seasons abruptly ended to experience some closure, or at their internship sites that they were loving and saying, 'Sorry, you can't come back here for the rest of the semester.' I wanted that, but we're finding new ways to connect and be in community with people that aren't ideal, but it just goes to show how much we want to be with other people. To celebrate graduations, seasons ending or an internship that you love, you're finding new ways to actually do those things.

## **KS**

I wholeheartedly agree with what Hunter's saying. Just to echo that, I don't think it's a lack of community we're experiencing, but it's an abrupt, unexpected, and not asked for change. Not to sugarcoat it, it's hard, it's really hard. There are a lot of, quite frankly, psychologically damaging effects of this for people, but there are some silver linings when we look at how this community is working and how we're navigating it. But we have to be so much more intentional with it.

I think I've had more one on one conversations with students, and real personal conversations with students, throughout this COVID experience than before, because that's the option right now. I'm thinking with my therapy cases, I was very concerned with moving on to Zoom because it's a human interaction we're having with therapy, with family therapy, and I was really wondering how this was going to work. How am I going to be able to give the same quality of service and interaction when it's over this video platform? What I'm noticing is, it's hard and it's not the same, but I'm getting this added benefit of seeing families in their homes and interacting within their homes via Zoom. There's a plus there in that even though we're losing something, we're also gaining something.

I've seen through other friends and family, people are reaching out to others and having real conversations and being more intentional about calling old friends, leaning on old relationships. Where before a lot of our day was spent with relationships of convenience, in some sense. We may have spent a lot of time talking to just whoever happened to be around in our day to day life. Whereas when we don't have those convenient interactions, we still need to get those social needs met, those interpersonal needs met, so we're having to reach out. And sometimes we're reaching out and renewing relationships that we



hadn't had time before to really foster. It looks different, but I think the community is still there, we just have to be intentional about reaching out and finding it. I think for some people that's easier than others. When you're one that it's not easy for you to reach out, it's especially hard. At the same time, it's a skill that I think is helpful to learn, and we're being forced to learn it right now. It's protective, to be able to have people in relationships in your life that you're reaching out to. I'm hoping that as we go through this, people are getting more and more comfortable with reaching out through those other options.

Social media is hard, because there's so many negatives to how social media affects us socially, intra-personally and inter-personally. We're having to, again, be intentional about what we're reaching out for and putting into our lives and also not inundating or saturating ourselves with social interactions or connections that are harmful or hurtful to us. Being mindful about, if I'm on Facebook, that's a community, if I'm on Facebook for two hours, how do I feel afterwards? What posts am I responding to? How does that make me feel afterwards? Really giving ourselves an opportunity to introspect in that regard. When something's making us feel bad or feel negative, to have to limit that in our lives a little bit more and just be more cognizant of how different social interactions through social media and other internet platforms are affecting our mood.

One thing that's particularly difficult for the college cohort right now, with what happened, is that it's a very unique time developmentally. Our focus is a lot on individuation, the professional term we call it the field. When you're growing up throughout childhood, a lot of your primary developmental goal is attachment based. You want to learn how to form secure attachments with caregivers and with people that you can depend on, and you have that safety of knowing they're there. Then as you're developing and approaching adulthood, you want to learn how to individuate. Not only understanding, 'I'm attached to these people, these people matter in my life,' but also, 'What separates me from these attachment figures now and what makes me unique? How do I stand on my own two feet and feel that security of these attachment figures, but not feel so dependent on them that I need them for my own identity and my own sense of self?'

With college, our friendships, our relationships with professors, these new relationships that we're forming on our own as an individual, not just as a person in the family, become really important. It can be more difficult to navigate family relationships, because we're almost developmentally pushing away

from our family members at the time. In a sense, it's healthy, it's developmentally what you're supposed to be doing at the time. When you're in that phase, it can be frustrating to be around your parents all the time, or your siblings all the time, because you're just not relating to them in the same way that you did when you were nine. When you're thrust back into that home environment, and then there's a lot of political controversy, there's just trauma from everything that's going on, there's uncertainty, everyone's stress level is high. I think that's particularly difficult for college students. We love our families, we all love our families, but developmentally it is a difficult time. It's that you're pulled out of this community that was working really well for you developmentally, and then you're forced back into very tight quarters with a community that you're supposed to be butting heads against at the time. It adds a lot of stress and it's difficult.

## **CZ**

Home life looks different for everybody. For some people, it's a great place to be and others not so much.

How can we be intentional about maintaining healthy relationships with those we live with, when we are spending more time with them?

## **HS**

Here's the question that I continually come back to, and Dr. Spirko kind of hit the nail on the head. Developmentally, 'Here's what I was looking forward to or hoping for and beginning to do,' and then now, 'Oh, just kidding, kind of still doing it, but also going back to some old stuff.' As I told students, this last spring, they were in a class called Family Problems, it's just about family patterns and processes. You get to see now with a different set of lenses, what's going on. The COVID effect is magnifying everything that's good, and everything that's bad. With the good stuff, how do we continue doing that from here on out? With the bad stuff, how do we start to remedy some of that?

If we drill down further, I think what we're talking about is how do you want to spend your time? I had students do this the other day in class; pull out your phones, go to the screen time thing on your phone, in your head see how much screen time you're spending, then see if you can cut that in half the next week, and what would you start doing instead of that? If I'm wanting to maintain, build or be intentional

about building healthy relationships, it takes some time and some effort. I'm asking people, 'Are you making the most important things important now?'

A lot of families I'm talking and working with are saying that this COVID thing is, like what Dr. Spirko was saying, a blessing in disguise for us. Because we're getting to reevaluate how we want to live and be as a family. I may not need to work four jobs. I think we can redo our finances to say, 'I think if I work one or two, we can have our time, we can have our finances met, but then we can spend more time as a family. I can spend more time with my children, I could spend more time working from home and have that interaction.'

That opportunity has always been there. We've just found ways to avoid it or fill it with other things. Now it's just confronting us more specifically each day as we have to, maybe, be confined at home, or in our dorm or whatever the case may be. The intentionality about maintaining a relationship, you could create a whole new narrative about what do we want to do as a family? And instead of just butting heads, which I don't think really gets anybody anywhere, it maybe turns the conversation from you and me, to us and we, and what do we want to do differently now?

## **KS**

Family science in general serves a very valuable place that I think psychology, clinical psychology at least, should, but doesn't as much fill a role, and that's the prevention that he was talking about. We often come in after there's already a lot of stuff going on, problems going on, and I think it colors our perspective.

In my perspective on this, 'How do we make the best of our family relationships and deal with this in close quarters?' Two major things come to mind with me; one of them is just being mindful of getting our emotional needs met. In a good situation, a good community situation, we've got good environmental supports, everything's going fine, we don't have a global pandemic going on. A lot of our emotional and psychological needs can get met pretty naturally, without us really focusing on having to do that. We don't really see it happening, it just becomes part of our life without our knowledge. In this kind of situation, we have to focus on it and do it, again that intentionality piece comes in, or we're going to not get our needs met.

I think of it as, we have that food pyramid of what do you need every day to get your nutritional needs met? What do you need a little bit of, what do you need a lot of? It's not something that you just think about once, you need it every day. I think of it in a similar way of, what do you need to get your mental and your emotional needs met on a daily basis? Have that conversation with yourself and think about it. What do you need every day? We're talking about coping skills, coping mechanisms. Coping skills is a term that many people think is a psychological jargon term, we don't really know what it means. A coping skill, quite simply, is just something that makes you feel good in the moment and helps you feel better when you're feeling bad. There are good coping skills and bad coping skills, or what we call adaptive and maladaptive. An adaptive coping skill, or good coping skill, is something that makes you feel good in the moment and is also good for you long term. A maladaptive coping skill, or a bad coping skill, is something that helps you in the moment, but it has long term negative repercussions.

We want to have this emotional needs pyramid with adaptive or good coping skills. Just think, 'When I get outside, and I'm under sunshine every day and I take a walk, I feel better. I feel better in the moment, and I feel better long term. I need to carve out 15 minutes every single day where I go outside and take a walk, and I need to make that a priority. Because I don't feel good when I don't do that.' Or, 'I need to feel like I'm doing something, I'm helping other people. Every single day I need to feel, at least for a moment, like I did something to help someone.' It could be calling your grandma and just checking in with her so she's not lonely.

With COVID, my husband and I were feeling kind of in a rut. The private practice where I see clients, we have a really wonderful and generous owner, and she made these care baskets for all of the employees that had toilet paper, back when we couldn't find toilet paper, in it and food. We made these little care baskets and just dropped them off to some neighbors. It may or may not have felt good to them, but it felt good to us. Finding ways to just help someone else every day, do something good for someone every day, those little things where you think, 'What do I need every day?' Some things you might not need daily, but you need weekly. Maybe I can't squeeze in calling an old friend for a good quality conversation every day, but maybe on Saturdays I do that. Scheduling those things in that you need.

Sometimes just an escape, a momentary escape, is really helpful. Getting a book that is not for school, that is not going to teach you anything but is just entertainment or watching a comedy show. I had a client once that jokingly said watching an episode of *Friends* was their coping mechanism. They thought that I would not think that's a good coping mechanism. That's a great coping mechanism. If you can have 30 minutes of your day where you're not worried about anything, and you're just laughing at the television and you're zoned out, that can be a great thing for your psychological health. When you're feeling better and you're feeling happier, you're going to relate better to your family. How we feel about ourselves and how we're just feeling is going to influence how we interpret other people.

I give an analogy sometimes. If you're feeling really self-conscious about how you look, let's say you just got a terrible haircut and you think you look awful, and you're walking down the street and somebody looks at you, you're going to think, 'Oh, they're noticing this horrible stain on my shirt, they're noticing how bad my hair looks, they're noticing that my shoes don't match,' whatever it may be. Just that look is going to make you feel more self-conscious than you already felt. If you're feeling really confident and good about yourself and you get that exact same environmental stimulus as somebody looking at you, you're going to think, 'Oh, they must notice how great I'm looking today,' and it makes you feel better.

Be really aware of how you're feeling about yourself. The better you can feel about yourself in this time, the better you're going to interpret interactions from family members. Because when we're all feeling bad or stressed, negative about ourselves or not as hopeful about the future, we're going to take neutral stimuli from family members and we're going to interpret them negatively. It will set everyone off in a way that's not helpful.

And the other piece I think that's super important in how we're navigating our family relationships right now is just setting realistic expectations. Now is a difficult time, no one's at their best right now. I think it's great to set goals of 'Oh, I want to learn how to play the piano, I'm going to learn how to speak Russian, I'm going to learn how to do something new that I didn't have time for.' It's great to set those goals, and it's really healthy to set aside some time to do self-improvement tasks. But at the same time, you don't want to set unrealistic goals and then feel bad about yourself for not meeting them.

Everyone's stressed out right now. A lot of people are dealing with situational depression, a lot of people are feeling difficulty maintaining hopefulness. To an extent that's normal, and it can be quite healthy to recognize that's normal. To recognize, 'I'm not at my most productive right now, I'm not at my best right now, and that's okay.' The last thing you want, on top of everything else, is to start harping on guilt. Thinking, 'Well, everyone else is doing all these things and I'm not doing anything, I've wasted this time.' That's really not true, and most people are less productive right now than normal. Most people are less happy right now than normal. Most people aren't meeting all the goals that they wanted to meet. Recognizing that can help put your own perceived failures in perspective and realize you're getting by and you're doing the best you can.

You have got to give yourself credit for those little wins and not be too hard on yourself when you're not meeting all those big goals that you set. I think everyone thought they were going to be trilingual and a gourmet chef at the end of COVID, and it's not all happening and that's fine. It doesn't mean there's anything wrong with you.

**CZ**

I appreciate that insight. And in a way, it's a little bit about giving yourself grace and patience, which is a really hard skill to learn.

**KS**

When we realize that in ourselves if we're not our best, and we really own that, and we feel okay with that, then if our family members say something that rubs us the wrong way it helps us extend that grace to other people as well.

**CZ**

To wrap up our conversation, I just want to hear, in your respective field, something that you've learned about relationships.

**HS**

I can't tell you how many conversations I've had with people where they just simply start out saying, 'I miss being able to see you in person.' Yes, I'm glad we have technology and we can make the most of it

and use it to stay connected to people that we wouldn't get to see right now. But being able to sit around in a circle, even if, social, physical distancing, and being able just to see people smile. Or sit around a campfire, whatever the case may be, how many people miss that.

I think that people are beginning to realize how much other people really do mean to them. It's a newfound recognition of how important these touch points that we get from other people are. If that has been lacking now, again, it brings up what can you do about it given the current circumstances? Dr. Spirko was mentioning the phone calls, the, 'Let's just go for a walk around the neighborhood. Where can we take a road trip to right now?' There are lots of things that we can still do. What's coming in now is the familiarity heuristic where, if I'm overwhelmed, I'm going to go back to what I'm most comfortable with, or I'm going to be concerned about what I can't do, as opposed to, 'Well, what can you do now?' Because there's lots of things still to do. What I'm learning about is how people yes, get stuck, we all get stuck, but with the right amount of a supportive community and relationships, we can get unstuck.

If someone is feeling like, 'I feel like I'm just spinning my wheels,' I would say, 'Go take a walk with someone and have a conversation about something other than what you're stuck about.' One of the assignments I give my students, it's called a spark, they have to do one thing each week that either makes themselves a better person or the world a better place. It has to be within their control to do, somewhat challenging, like a healthy risk, and meets an immediate need. If I get in the habit of starting to do that right now, in terms of my relationships, making that phone call to someone that I haven't spoken to in a while, that's a muscle that I'm developing so that when the next thing hits. I've got the community that I'm going to need for that. I've got the community that I need for right now.

Yes, COVID is horrible, and there's a lot that we have learned about relationships and people right now. But it's also an opportunity to maybe re-envision about how we connect to each other and reconnect to people as well.

## **KS**

It feels good to have things that we want, and it also feels good to seek things we want. Those are both important for us from a psychological standpoint. Sometimes missing something, feeling that lack of

something, it helps us to value it more. I think especially when you're in this field, when you're in a psychology or family science field, if you're teaching and you're working with clients or patients, you're inundated with interpersonal interaction. You're constantly interacting with people. Before COVID, I was interacting with people all the time where I really valued my alone time. I enjoyed just being able to decompress, be by myself and not interact with people all the time. Because that was something that I didn't have as much of in my life, and I didn't feel lonely a lot. Feeling lonely, missing people and looking forward to being able to see people, it makes you value relationships more.

We never want to take things for granted, but when you always have something it's impossible not to, at least somewhat, take it for granted. Having this time as a global community, certainly as a local community as well, missing that community, wishing that we could see our friends, wishing that we could go out to dinner, wishing we could do all these things, it helps remind us how important it is. It makes us value those relationships more and those interactions more.

We talk about that in couples relationships. When you're together all the time, you're a mesh, it can not necessarily be good for a relationship. Some time apart is helpful, because missing someone makes you want to spend time with them and reminds you what you like about spending time with them. As a parent, it's good sometimes to be at work and to miss your kids. Because when you miss your kids, it makes you value the time with them more, and it makes you a better parent when you have that time with them. Same thing with our friends and other people in our community, having that opportunity to miss people and look forward to seeing them helps us to cherish those relationships and value them more.

In the long run we've all had this feeling together where we thought, 'Oh, I miss just seeing people, I miss just saying hi to people in the hallway.' That experience is valuable when we learn how much it can help us cherish those interactions when we have them back.

## **CZ**

I think we can all agree that now is certainly a time of learning and a change of perspective, if nothing else.



**HS**

Could I just give a plug for two different resources available to anyone listening? If you're a student and you want to go talk to somebody because you're thinking about some things or this has been really difficult for you, there's the University Counseling Center available to you. If you're a Lipscomb faculty, or staff person, or a community member as well, there's the Lipscomb Family Therapy Center that offers low-cost therapy services for individuals, couples and families. Those can be a resource if you want to go talk to a professional. There are obviously other mental health professionals that you can reach out and connect with as well.

**KS**

Counseling is like personal training. You could be in great shape and going and seeing a personal trainer can still teach you something and make you feel that much better. There's no one that couldn't benefit in some way from counseling. Several of the interns are great therapists that will be helpful, and they appreciate you being there as much as you will appreciate the opportunity.

Do not hesitate, do not think you're wasting someone's time, do not think that you don't have serious enough problems to warrant going in. You're doing a service by making yourself available and opening yourself up to that experience as much as you're gaining a service from it.

**CZ**

Well, thank you both for sharing this conversation with me. I really appreciate your insight and also all that you do for Lipscomb and the community.

**KS**

Thank you so much for planning this I think this is a wonderful topic to address right now.

**CZ**

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