

CIRCUIT BREAKER DOES NOT MEAN MARRIAGE BREAKER

How To Survive The Circuit Breaker Without Antagonising Each Other

Introduction

In Senior Pastor Daniel's inaugural Pastoral Word in Season, he reminded us that this COVID-19 is a shaking of the house of the Lord; it is a separation of those who are overcomers compared to those who are struggling. We must be people who are priests and kings walking closely with the Lord. We must be people sharing words of faith, hope and love.

In this vein, the Marriage Team would like to share with the BBTC family, particularly the married couples in our midst, such words of faith, hope and love to encourage you to keep your relationships alive and be overcomers during this trying season.

Many couples now experience dramatic changes to their routines. They are confined to working from home in shared spaces. They are torn between looking after young children and caring for elderly parents. Some face possible unemployment and suffer from financial insecurity. All these are recipes for conflict between husband and wife. It is no wonder that the media is reporting an increase in divorces. Applications for divorce in Xi'an, China, spiked as a result of home quarantine. British lawyers are predicting a similar trend in the UK post lockdown.

To help BBTC couples weather this storm, here is "How To Survive The Circuit Breaker Without Killing Each Other".

For Husbands and Wives ...

- **Communicate Care.** Make a commitment to care about your spouse's feelings and sense of helplessness. Listen to each other's worries, fears, hopes and emotions. Recognise and talk about the stress you are experiencing. Agree on ways to manage this stress. Do the *Personal Stress Profile Exercise* in the Appendix.
- **Commit to a Couple Time.** You may be hard pressed for time to get together meaningfully with each other in the busyness of each day. Now is the golden opportunity to install that Couple Time to renew and refresh your relationship. Set aside protected time for this. Be willing to open up and talk. Engage in active listening. Practise empathy. There are proven exercises to help you do this. For example, the *I-Message and Love Bank Deposit Exercises* in the Appendix are helpful tools.
- **Carve out Alone Time.** Experts agree that being together in close quarters 24/7 puts strain on a marriage. It is ok to take a break from each other. Express your expectations and agree on a formula. For instance, you may want an hour to yourself to chill out and read a book, or you would like to watch a particular TV show uninterrupted. Honour one another's request for this break. If there are children, take turns to mind them.
- **Care for Self.** You must also refuel or recharge so that you can last the distance. You will then have something to give to your spouse and family. Care for your body, soul and spirit. Do not neglect physical exercise and sleep. Top up your bank with positive emotions. Above all, spend time with the Lord in quiet devotion and feed on His Word. Let the joy of the Lord be your strength. (Nehemiah 8:10)

- **Create a Safe Environment at Home.** Counsellors have advised that when people feel safe, they are encouraged to open up and connect. You can create that environment for yourselves and your children. Practise kindness and respect towards each other. Gather as a family and share your appreciation for one another. Count your blessings and demonstrate gratitude. Mimic our Saviour's calmness and composure as you go through the day. Create a sanctuary in the midst of the storm.
- **Construct Routines.** This is an oft-repeated but sound advice. We are wired to desire structure and the familiar. Routines can help ground us and enable us to go through this difficult period. Plan for meal times, work time, study time, chill-out time, and stick to them as much as possible.
- **Carry out Short-Term Plans.** Writing on Forbes online, marriage therapist Erika Boissiere advised that getting a handle on the day-to-day stuff in the midst of COVID-19 can help quell anxieties and foster teamwork in the family. Take one day at a time and find ways to take care of the essentials. How to tackle the supermarket runs? How to decide what to cook or what to order for takeaways? How to get to the GP if someone is unwell? How to help your child with home-based learning? How to manage the demands of WFH (Work From Home)? How to divide household chores and assign tasks? After all, our Lord Jesus did command us to not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. (Matthew 6:34).
- **Capitalise on Teaching Moments.** Now is a great time to learn and grow together. As the Holy Spirit teaches you life lessons, share them with your spouse. Affirm and encourage each other. Within the confines of your home, your lives are on display. Model for your children love, honour, patience, joy and faith, bringing them up in the training and instruction of the Lord. (Ephesians 6:4).

For the WFH folks ...

Psychology Today provides some tips for those of you who are working from home during this Circuit Breaker.

- **Follow your usual routine as much as possible.** For example, waking up at the same time, getting "dressed" for work, having that first cuppa in the morning, etc.
- **Guard against overworking.** Employees do not want their bosses or co-workers to think that they are slacking off. Hence, they work too long hours. Do not let this guilt get to you. Your usual transit time from office to home gives you the buffer between work and home. Learn to create such time boundaries now to separate the two.
- **Breaks are essential for your mental wellbeing.** As you take breaks in your office, be sure to schedule such time-off for yourself while working from home. Avoid prolonged sitting. Remember to move and stretch. Health experts have provided evidence that long hours of sitting is bad for you.
- **Re-arrange things around the house,** if possible, to create a conducive space for you to work.

For those with children in the house ...

Focus on the Family has a very practical tip sheet for juggling childcare and working from home.

- **Routines are critical for children** as they are for adults. Without routines, children may perceive this as time-off and will not be motivated to learn. If your children are too young to keep engaged, you may need to plan your workday according to their routines. For example, starting work earlier before they wake, using their nap time to work on that complex project, etc.
- **Set up designated spaces in the house for your work and your children's learning.** Ensure that they understand the space is for online classes and homework; it is not for playing.
- **Establish rules.** Explain to your children that when you are in your workspace, you cannot be interrupted, unless it is an emergency.
- **Be intentional in affirming your children** when they have shown effort to stick to schedules and follow rules. Reward them appropriately and reinforce their positive behaviour.

While these are simple, practical handles, we pray that they will serve as reminders for us to guard that which is important and precious in the sight of our God. Be blessed!

+++

References

1. Smalley, G. (2020, March 19). 10 Ways Your Marriage Can Survive The Coronavirus Quarantine. Retrieved from <https://www.focusonthefamily.com/marriage/10-ways-your-marriage-can-survive-the-coronavirus-quarantine/>
2. Gleeson, H. (2020, March 21). How to stay married through coronavirus. Retrieved from <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-03-21/how-to-stay-married-through-coronavirus/12073778>
3. Boissiere, E. (2020, March 19). COVID-19 Lock Down: How To Manage Your Relationships In Tight Quarters. Retrieved from <https://www.forbes.com/sites/erikaboissiere/2020/03/19/covid-19-lock-down-how-to-manage-your-relationships-in-tight-quarters/>
4. Focus On The Family Singapore. (2020, April 2). Working from Home with Kids. Retrieved from https://family.org.sg/FOTFS/Blog/Work-Life/working_from_home_with_kids.aspx
5. Tirado, B. (2020, March 17). 5 Tips for Working from Home Amid COVID-19. Retrieved from <https://www.psychologytoday.com/sg/blog/digital-leaders/202003/5-tips-working-home-amid-covid-19>

APPENDIX

Personal Stress Profile Exercise – for managing roles and expectations

(Source: Prepare-Enrich “Building Strong Marriages”. www.prepare-enrich.com)

1. Each of you to select four issues that are the most stressful for you while WFH.
2. Review each issue and put it into one of the four cells below.
3. Select one issue from Box 1 and work together as a couple to achieve your goals. Communicate about the issue. Use good conflict resolution skills, and exercise flexibility with each other.

	Able to Change	Difficult to Change
High Priority	<div>Box 1: Most Critical Issues</div> <div><i>What changes can you each make?</i></div>	<div>Box 2</div> <div><i>How do you plan to cope?</i></div>
Low Priority	<div>Box 3</div> <div><i>Are you spending too much time on low priority issues?</i></div>	<div>Box 4</div> <div><i>Can you accept or forget about these issues?</i></div>

I Message Exercise

(Source: Adapted from “Journey to Intimacy” by Dr Wei-Jen Huang)

Describe the event (be specific)

When I saw

Describe your feelings

I felt

Describe your thoughts/views

Because

State your needs or hope (behaviour you would prefer)

I need (or hope that)

Here is an example:

Describe the event (be specific)

When I saw you seated there last night not helping me to change Jay's diaper,

Describe your feelings

I felt very upset and frustrated

Describe your thoughts/views

Because I was already busy minding the other two children.

State your needs or hope (behaviour you would prefer)

I hope you will take the initiative to help in future as a way to support me in caring for the children.

Here is a list of feeling words to help you get started in expressing the emotions inside you.

Source: Cited in Beverly Hazte, "Pastoral Care & Chaplaincy" class notes, Fall 2000. Talbot Theological Seminary.

Feeling Words								
A Little	Mad	Sad	Glad	Afraid	Confused	Ashamed	Lonely	A Little
↓	Bothered	Down	At ease	Uneasy	Curious	Uncomfortable	Out of place	↓
	Ruffled	Blue	Secure	Apprehensive	Uncertain	Awkward	Left out	
	Irritated	Somber	Comfortable	Careful	Ambivalent	Clumsy	Unheeded	
	Displeased	Low	Relaxed	Cautious	Doubtful	Self-conscious	Lonesome	
	Annoyed	Glum	Contented	Hesitant	Unsettled	Disconcerted	Disconnected	
	Steamed	Lonely	Optimistic	Tense	Hesitant	Chagrined	Remote	
	Irked	Disappointed	Satisfied	Anxious	Perplexed	Abashed	Invisible	
	Perturbed	Worn out	Refreshed	Nervous	Puzzled	Embarrassed	Unwelcome	
	Frustrated	Melancholy	Stimulated	Edgy	Muddled	Flustered	Cut off	
	Angry	Downhearted	Pleased	Distressed	Distracted	Sorry	Excluded	
	Fed up	Unhappy	Warm	Scared	Flustered	Apologetic	Insignificant	
	Disgusted	Dissatisfied	Snug	Frightened	Jumbled	Ashamed	Ignored	
	Indignant	Gloomy	Happy	Repulsed	Unfocused	Regretful	Neglected	
	Ticked off	Mournful	Encouraged	Agitated	Fragmented	Remorseful	Separated	
	Bristling	Grieved	Tickled	Afraid	Dismayed	Guilty	Removed	
	Fuming	Depressed	Proud	Shocked	Insecure	Disgusted	Detached	
	Explosive	Lousy	Cheerful	Alarmed	Dazed	Belittled	Isolated	
	Enraged	Crushed	Thrilled	Overwhelmed	Bewildered	Humiliated	Unwanted	
	Irate	Defeated	Delighted	Frantic	Lost	Violated	Rejected	
	Incensed	Dejected	Joyful	Panic Stricken	Stunned	Dirty	Deserted	
A Lot	Burned	Empty	Elated	Horrificed	Chaotic	Mortified	Outcast	A Lot
	Burned up	Wretched	Exhilarated	Petrified	Torn	Defiled	Abandoned	
	Outraged	Despairing	Overjoyed	Terrified	Baffled	Devastated	Desolate	
	Furious	Devastated	Ecstatic	Numb	Dumbfounded	Degraded	Forsaken	

Love Bank Deposit : Building Intimacy

To build intimacy for a life time, we need to deposit into our LOVE BANK.

Deposits – good feelings (love, respect, affirmation)

Withdrawals – bad feelings (criticisms, shame, hurts)

TOP UP your partner's love bank regularly

Affirmation, for example, is a vital aspect of love. Our Lord Jesus was affirmed by the Heavenly Father in Matthew 3:17 : *And a voice from heaven said, "This is My Son, whom I love; with Him I am well pleased."*

Love Bank Deposit Exercise

(Source: Adapted from "Journey to Intimacy" by Dr Wei-Jen Huang)

- Underline one positive attribute that describes your partner and which you want to appreciate him/her for
- Share one task that your partner did for you recently that you want to thank your partner
- Do not use words such as "but", "however", "although"

Words with Positive Attributes

Accountable	Credible	Enthusiastic	Helpful	Motivated	Practical	Teachable
Adventurous	Decisive	Exciting	Honest	Open-minded	Realistic	Thoughtful
Authentic	Devoted	Flexible	Humble	Organised	Respectful	Transparent
Balanced	Dependable	Focused	Independent	Outgoing	Reasonable	Truthful
Caring	Determined	Forgiving	Industrious	Passionate	Selfless	Trustworthy
Cheerful	Diligent	Generous	Insightful	Patient	Sensible	Understanding
Compassionate	Disciplined	Genuine	Logical	Perceptive	Sensitive	Upright
Cooperative	Easy-going	Good Listener	Loyal	Personable	Sincere	Warm
Courageous	Engaging	Non-judgmental	Mature	Pleasant	Strong	Wise
Cordial	Empathetic	Objective	Modest	Positive	Supportive	<i>Others...</i>