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Family Connections  
BYU School of Family Life Alumni Magazine



Family Connections  
School of Family Life  
Alumni Magazine  
Summer 2022

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**Publisher:** Erin Kramer Holmes

**Editor:** Daniel Frost

**Art Director:** Lis Malmgren

**Student Editor-in-Chief:** Rebecca Zundel

**Contributing Student Writers and**

**Editors:** Meghan Cawley, Jane Christensen, Misha Crawford, Shannon Hadlock, Brooklyn Humpherys, Annie Nielson

**Copy Editor:** Lisa Bolin Hawkins

**Cover Art:** Lis Malmgren

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## Message from the Director

Dear School of Family Life Alumni,

I am the new Director of the School of Family Life, and it is my pleasure to introduce another edition of our *Family Connections* magazine. In his last message from the director, Alan Hawkins highlighted the many strides SFL has taken over the past 30+ years to achieve our mission and to help strengthen families. I echo Alan's sentiment that the pandemic has not weakened our efforts, the quality and rigor of our programs keep expanding, and you—our alumni—continue to be a unique force for good in your communities and congregations. I hope the current issue will help you connect with students, faculty, and other SFL alumni as we all work toward strengthening families in our own spheres of influence.

To aid you in the pursuit of that goal, this issue spotlights our alumna Tamara Fackrell; highlights diversity, inclusion, and unity efforts in the School; offers practical tips for using knowledge from our courses in your homes; introduces you to our new *Family Perspectives Podcast*; and more.

Best wishes to you and your families!

Sincerely,

*Erin Kramer Holmes*

Erin Kramer Holmes

Director, School of Family Life



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Summer 2022

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# The Plan of Happiness?:

## How Family Stress Theory is Actually the Plan of Salvation

Dr. Ashley LeBaron-Black

**F**or many of us, family life is where the greatest joy, the greatest stretching, and the greatest heartache are found. This is no accident—it was designed to be so by all-knowing, all-loving Heavenly Parents.<sup>1</sup> It is an eternal pattern, the way in which we can gain the necessary experience and develop (or adapt, as I’ll speak about soon) in the necessary ways to eventually become like our eternal Prototypes.<sup>2</sup> In Lehi’s last recorded conversation with his son Jacob, he teaches us about these eternally-bound dualities: “For it must needs be, that there is an opposition in all things. If not so, . . . righteousness could not be brought to pass, neither wickedness, neither holiness nor misery, neither good nor bad.”<sup>3</sup> I do not believe it is an accident that Lehi then goes on to describe the first spouses and parents and the first children and siblings (we see you, Cain) on the Earth. I also wonder, given that we are Their “work” (sounds about right) and “glory”<sup>4</sup> and given God’s weeping throughout the scriptures,<sup>5</sup> whether our Heavenly Parents’ greatest joy and greatest heartache come from Their children.

Clearly, family stress is an eternal reality. I have the great pleasure of teaching SFL 336: Family Theories. (During my hiring, when then-Director of the School of Family Life Alan Hawkins, asked me to rank my top five classes I’d like to teach, I listed Family Theories as my top choice. To my surprise and delight, he expressed that it wouldn’t be a problem—apparently not everyone is clamoring to teach theory.) One of my favorite theories to cover is family stress theory. Reuben Hill conceptualized this theory through the ABC-X model where A is a stressor, B is the resources people have to cope with the stressor, C is the perceptions people have about the stressor (and about their resources), and X is the level of that which occurs, depending on the interaction of A, B, and C (see Figure 1).<sup>6</sup>

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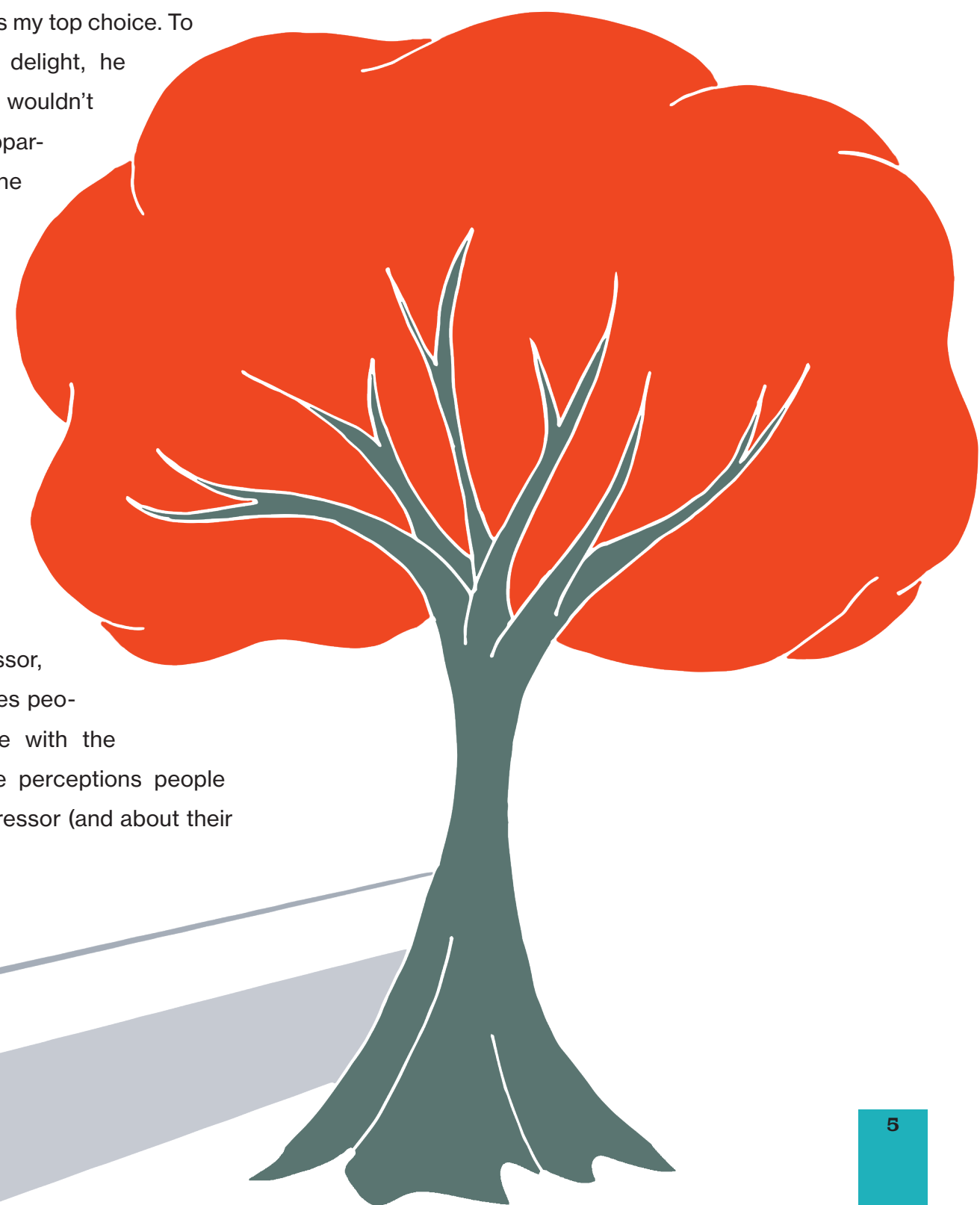
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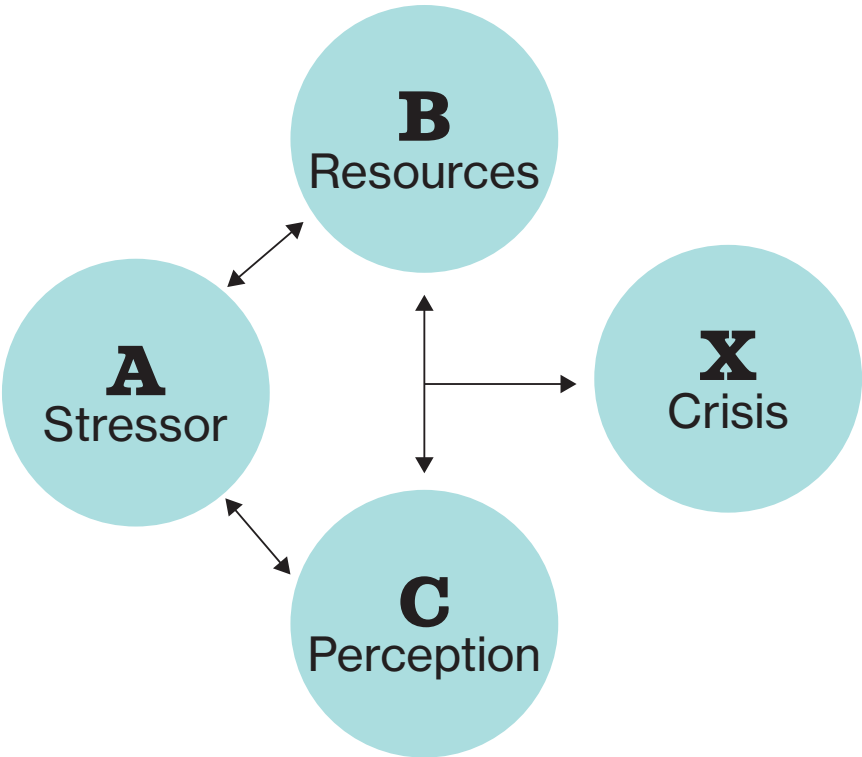


Figure 1. Reuben Hill's (1949) ABC-X model of family stress

The ABC-X model is helpful for understanding how stressors affect families and how we can support them. However, scholars began to recognize that stressors aren't always all bad—in some cases, stressors actually encourage positive growth individually and relationally. In later iterations of family stress theory (i.e., the Double ABC-X model<sup>7</sup> and the Family Adjustment and Adaptation Response or FAAR model<sup>8</sup>), theoreticians Hamilton McCubbin and Joan Patterson accounted for this divergent potential with the terms “bonadaptation” and “maladaptation.” When stressors and pileup stressors occur and the family equilibrium is compromised, crisis occurs, and families must adapt somehow to achieve a new equilibrium. This adaptation can be

either devastating or constructive for families; that is, families can be worse or better off than they were before the stressors. As an example from my own research, my colleagues and I have found that the weight of financial stressors can either tear couples apart or help them grow closer together.<sup>9</sup> Maladaptation is a sobering reminder of the importance of helping families—especially disadvantaged families—avoid stressors, access resources, and develop beneficial perceptions. Too often, maladaptation is the result for families who experience severe or chronic stressors and don't have access to the resources they need to succeed. On the other hand, bonadaptation is an encour-

aging goal to shoot for. “The possibility of bonadaptation following a stressor suggests that individuals, couples, and families can thrive not just in spite of stressors, but because of them. Stressors can act as catalysts for positive growth.”<sup>10</sup> In other words, all the crap we experience can “work together for [our] good.”<sup>11</sup>

My wonderful husband and I recently celebrated our first anniversary. Our first year of marriage was, sure enough, the happiest and hardest year of my life. I tell my husband, Tom, that he makes everything better, and it's true. I'm convinced that there's nothing so joyful as a marriage between two people who are both doing their best to love and care for

each other and nurture their relationship. And there's no one I'd rather go through hard things with than Tom. In our first year of marriage, we had normative newlywed stressors like figuring out sex, learning to communicate about difficult topics, adjusting to living together, integrating our finances, joining each other's families, etc. In addition, we had to figure out how to do a wedding during a pandemic (spoiler: despite the PowerPoints I had been making about my perfect wedding since the age of 10, we eloped to Vegas and got married by a female minister in a drive-thru, and I wouldn't have it any other way), I defended a dissertation and became a PhD, we both started new jobs (my first post-student job and Tom's first post-career-change job), we moved to a new home and state (which was not only a mas-

sive undertaking but also a huge sacrifice for Tom to leave his family and friends, his house, and amazing weather), Tom's sister was—and still is—battling cancer, and my parents got divorced (which sounds like an event but was actually a drawn-out, painful process that has caused strain and severed relationships among other family members). In short, it was an emotionally exhausting year. But we grew a lot as a couple. The difficulties Tom and I tackled together brought us closer together and helped us appreciate the good. For example, my parents' relationship was such a stark contrast to my relationship with Tom that it made me appreciate Tom all the more, and I felt more motivated to work at our relationship. Our pileup stressors contributed to our bonadaptation as a couple.

**I'm convinced that there's nothing so joyful as a marriage between two people who are both doing their best to love and care for each other and nurture their relationship.**

Stressors are an essential component of our journey toward realizing our divine potential. As Elder Holland beautifully said, “The path of salvation has always led one way or another through Gethsemane.”<sup>12</sup> Circling back to the conversation between Lehi and Jacob, Lehi teaches his son that were it not for Eve's and Adam's courageous decisions to partake of the fruit, “all things which were created must have remained in the same state in which they were after they were created . . . And they would have had no children; wherefore they would have remained in a state of innocence, having no joy, for they knew no misery; doing no good, for they knew no sin. But behold, all things have been done in the wisdom of



[Heavenly Parents] who knoweth all things. Adam [and Eve] fell that men [and women] might be; and men [and women] are, that they might have joy.”<sup>13</sup> In other words, Eve and Adam made stressors—including sins—and therefore eventual bonadaptation possible. Lehi then comes full circle back to the Savior, whose Atonement, death, and Resurrection complete the Plan of Happiness and make this “joy” for which we were created possible for each of us who chooses to accept His infinite mercy. Indeed, we all have full access to the only resource needed to achieve eternal bonadaptation: the Atonement of Jesus Christ. Our acceptance of this greatest of gifts can be seen as the perception (the “C” component of the ABC-X model) needed to achieve bonadapta-

tion. The ability of resources to help families achieve bonadaptation depends on the family’s awareness and use of those resources. Thus, when inevitable stressors (A) occur, as we choose (C) to let the power of the Atonement (B) work in our hearts and our lives, as Lehi said, Jesus “shall consecrate [our] afflictions for [our] gain” (X/bonadaptation).<sup>14</sup> Hallelujah! In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

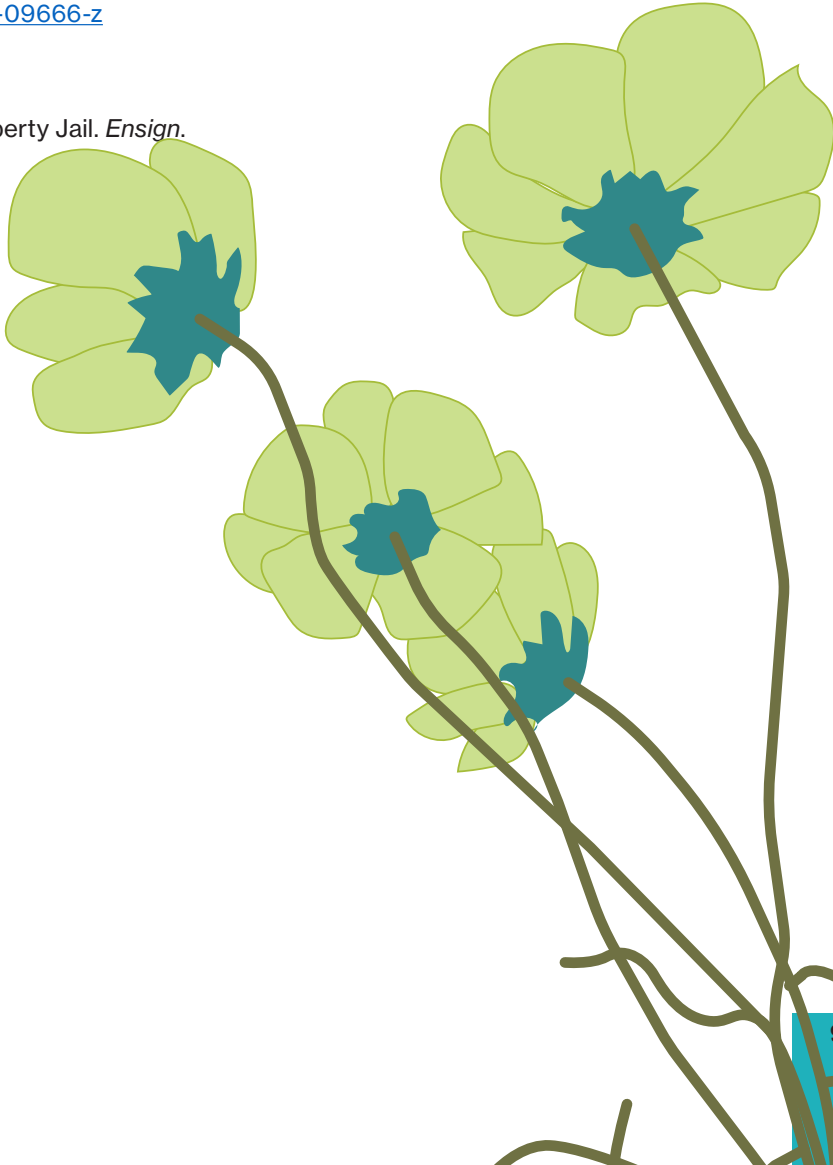
Dr. Ashley LeBaron-Black



Dr. Ashley LeBaron-Black is an Assistant Professor of Family Life at Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah. She received her PhD in Family Studies and Human Development from the University of Arizona. Her research focus is family finance, including couple finance and financial socialization. Ashley has published 36 peer-reviewed articles and is an Associate Editor for the Journal of Family and Economic Issues. She is Chair of the Family Financial Wellbeing focus group for the National Council on Family Relations (NCFR).

Endnotes

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4. Moses 1:39
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10. LeBaron et al., 2020, p. 424.
11. Doctrine and Covenants 90:24
12. Holland, J. R. (2009, September). Lessons from Liberty Jail. *Ensign*.
13. 2 Nephi 2:22–25
14. 2 Nephi 2:2





**"Verily I say, men should be anxiously engaged in a good cause, and do many things of their own free will, and bring to pass much righteousness." Doctrine and Covenants 58:27**

Brigham Young University offers its students a challenge: "Enter to learn, go forth to serve." This challenge illustrates that while it is important for us to gain knowledge in the classroom, it is essential that we use our knowledge to enrich our family, our community, and our world. Our education is a blessing—we should use it to lift and bless others.

Here's how an SFL alumna, Dr. Tamara Fackrell, has taken BYU's challenge to heart by using her education to help people throughout the world strengthen their relationships.

### Entering to Learn

Tamara earned her undergraduate degree in Communication and Psychology from BYU then earned her juris doctorate from BYU's J. Reuben Clark Law School. After graduating, Tamara began her work as a divorce family mediator where she helps couples

and families navigate divorce; she strives to bring peace to families and children in this difficult situation and helps divorced parents start a new journey as partners raising their kids.

After working closely with so many families going through divorce, Tamara decided to expand her expertise and do preventative work to strengthen marriages and families. She returned to BYU for her PhD in Marriage, Family, and Human Development and specialized in the decision-making process for couples at the crossroads of divorce. Now, in addition to working as a divorce family mediator, Tamara uses her time to educate couples and families on how to strengthen and improve their relationships.

### Going Forth to Serve

#### Educating Families

Tamara educates couples by holding stake firesides, speaking at Education Week, and running classes on marriage and parenting. She and her husband host marriage seminars twice a year, which are intensive two-day retreats for couples who want to improve their marriage. She also holds date-night initiatives where couples participate in service activities and learn to strengthen their relationship. Additionally, Tamara has written books and developed marriage journals to help couples strengthen their marriage. She is a big advocate of spouses holding a weekly couple's council to check in with each other and discuss their relationship.

Tamara also writes books for children to teach them about effective communication and conflict resolution. In the Character Education Heroes series, children learn about their own communication style (represented as an animal) as well as how to use elements of other communication styles when needed.

#### Global Service

Tamara is also deeply involved in service and charity work. She and her family volunteered for the Dominican Starfish Foundation, a charity that serves the people of the Dominican Republic by assisting with shelter, food, clothing, education, employment, and health and well-being. While in the Dominican Republic, Tamara was asked to host two weddings for couples who wanted to be baptized in The Church of

**Our education is a blessing—we should use it to lift and bless others.**

Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints but could not be because they were unmarried and unable to pay for the costs of a wedding.

This experience of giving couples the opportunity to be married touched Tamara deeply: it expanded her focus beyond the work of helping couples stay married to include the work of helping couples get married. Tamara was inspired to start her own charity, the Change the World Foundation. Through this

foundation, individuals can sponsor the wedding of a Dominican couple who cannot afford marriage on their own. Using her own resources, Tamara has purchased wedding dresses, tuxedos, bridesmaid dresses, decorations, flowers, and tablecloths—everything a couple needs for a wedding—and has made it all available for couples to borrow through the Change the World Foundation. The foundation gives wedding rings to each couple, helps pay for their legal paperwork, and hosts many weddings each month.

Tamara embodies the challenge “Enter to learn, go forth to serve.” Because she believes that good family life is the core to good living, she uses her time, energy, and resources to help people get married and stay married. Her education and her passion for helping others enable her to positively influence couples and families throughout the world.

## Connect With Tamara



*Help your children  
communicate effectively*  
<http://ceheroes.com/>



*Find resources to  
strengthen your marriage*  
<https://mindfulmarriage.love/>

*Get tips on improving  
your relationship*  
[mindful\\_marriage on Instagram](#)



# How can *you* use your education to *go forth and serve?*



Click the link or scan the QR code to learn how other alumni are using their education to go forth and serve:  
<https://familylife.byu.edu/career-spotlights>

## Join the SFL Alumni Facebook Group

Stay updated on events, volunteer/job openings, family tips, and more.  
Join the BYU SFL Alumni Connect group on Facebook!

Here's how to join:

- Search “BYU SFL Alumni Connect” on Facebook or go to <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1681866192048917/>
- Select “Join Group”
- Answer the qualifying questions so that we can verify you are a BYU SFL alumni





# What's New in the School of Family Life?

## Applied Statistics for SFL Majors

The School of Family Life aims to address changing needs and provide a better experience for students. This is evident in the creation of their new Applied Statistics and Data Management class.

This new course satisfies the statistics requirement for the major and presents a look at statistics through the lens of family life. Students learn to use coding software to analyze large sets of data for trends related to families by using real data from local institutions or non profits across the country.

### A Professor's Perspective

Dr. Jocelyn Wikle explains, "The new Applied Statistics and Data Management class offers exciting opportunities for students to deepen their research and critical thinking skills. The class focuses on application relevant to SFL majors and uses hands-on experiences to teach. Tightly interweaving concepts with applications at every step better prepares students to thrive in research and work environments in the future. A highlight of teaching the class is partnering with local non profit organizations. This creates an opportunity for students to work on real-world issues and make contributions to community organizations, which is fun and deeply meaningful. The partnerships have been incredibly successful and have opened future opportunities for students. I look forward to SFL offering this class to more students in the future."

### A Student's Review

Student Jane Christensen writes, "When I first started in the Family Life major, I was already dreading Stats 121. For me, 'statistics' was basically synonymous with the word 'yikes.' I like classes that feel relevant to me, and a general stats class didn't seem to fit that mold. Then, I heard about a new statistics class for SFL students that could count for the Stats 121 requirement, and my curiosity was piqued.

"I had never written a line of code in my life, but by the end of the course I was able to replicate findings from a Pew Research study, and I got to write up a report for a local institution that helps families dealing with divorce. In the report, I was able to use their data (supplemented by additional, nationally representative data) to identify the things they were doing well, areas in which they could improve, and specific suggestions for that improvement.

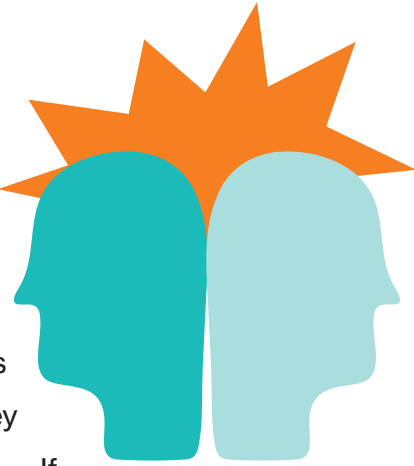
"In this class, I felt such triumph when I figured out how to solve a problem that I had never before encountered or learned a skill on my own, and I'm so grateful for the experience of that course and for the fulfillment I was able to find in something that wasn't quite my speed or within my comfort zone."

# Recent Publications From SFL Faculty

## How Conflict Can Make Your Marriage Better

by Dr. Jason Whiting

"An intimate relationship, by definition, involves challenges. Relationships combine two different people into one entity, which is tricky because each person has unique preferences, backgrounds, biases, and values. As partners connect, they will create interesting combinations—some exciting, and others aggravating. . . . If



something isn't right, it may need to be dealt with. But that does not mean it must be tackled with force and anger. Conflict need not be combat. . . . Differences are not the problem, but the way those differences are dealt with can be. Here are four suggestions on how to talk about tricky issues and deal constructively with the natural conflict that occurs in relationships."



Scan the QR code or go to <https://bit.ly/3znqbcm> to learn more about how conflict can strengthen your marriage.

## Financial Stress Can Help Relationships Flourish

by Matthew Saxey and Dr. Ashley B. LeBaron-Black

"Although the COVID-19 pandemic may be advancing toward an end, financial stress from the pandemic may not be following a similar pattern. Some relationships are likely still experiencing the results of the economic fallout of the pandemic, even though things seem to be improving in the United States. Couples may be feeling scorched and crushed under the enormous pressure. . . .

"Luckily, recent research suggests that under some circumstances, financial stressors can lead couples to thrive—not just in spite of financial stressors but because of them. In fact, financial stressors, like those brought about from COVID-19, can be catalysts for relational growth."



Scan the QR code or go to <https://bit.ly/3HfV5W6> to learn more about how financial stressors can help couples thrive.



Sexual Mindfulness Combats Silent Suffering

by Dr. Chelom E. Leavitt



“Sexual struggles can be embedded in a . . . culture of silent suffering. We may feel there are no responders and that we are ‘the only one’ who has this struggle. We may have questions or need help but not know where to turn. We may have bought into a culture that discourages discussing sexual struggles by labeling them as inappropriate or embarrassing. Some learn that sexual development, menstruation, or sexual relationships are topics to be avoided, so they learn to silently suffer as they try to navigate these topics without guidance. Luckily, there are so many tools now to help individuals and couples break the silence of their marital or sexual suffering.”



Scan the QR code or go to <https://bit.ly/3ztR2TY> to learn more about combatting this silent suffering.

Recent Publications From SFL Students

The Power of Positivity: Finding Joy and Happiness Throughout Our Trials

by Tawnya Roth

“A diagnosis of cancer comes to many, but even those who never get cancer will almost certainly have difficult times in their lives. While challenging moments can be extremely tough, they can also teach us valuable lessons when we keep a positive attitude. My journey through cancer, as arduous as it was, became a meaningful chapter in my life as I learned to work through my grief, serve, maintain gratitude, and strive for hope.”



Scan the QR code or go to <https://bit.ly/3zveolR> to learn more about the power of positivity through trials.

4 Things to Remember When Helping Kids Foster Resiliency

by Livy Andrus

“For many of us, the coping skills that we learned during childhood helped us cultivate *resilience*, which is the ability to overcome serious hardship. Resilient children are adaptive, self-efficient, and confident problem-solvers who, when they leave home, are ready to tackle the daily stresses of adult life. Harvard researchers explain, ‘Science tells us that some children develop resilience . . . while others do not.’ Whether children develop resilience or not depends largely on the type of environment they are raised in. When parents or caretakers make it a priority to create an environment that fosters resilience, they set their children up for success by helping them develop their own arsenal of coping skills.”



Scan the QR code or go to <https://bit.ly/3aXZocB> to learn more about how to teach kids resilience.



Weathering Your Child’s Emotional Storms

by Anna Mader

“In fact, early childhood can be the perfect recipe for the perfect storm: having big emotions and not yet having the skillset to manage them. Parents then face the challenge of guiding their children through different personal and social situations. Fights over a specific toy, clinginess when being dropped off at daycare, or meltdowns at the drop of a hat—these can be hard for both parents and children.

“When the wind gusts in, the rain pours down, and the lightning crashes overhead, children themselves can become overwhelmed and frightened by the feelings that begin to flood through them. Navigating a child’s emotional storms can be difficult for parents too—and the suddenness and intensity of the moment may catch them off guard.”



Scan the QR code or go to <https://bit.ly/3aDUroZ> to learn more about weathering your child's emotional storms.

# School of Family Life by the Numbers

In 2021 the School of Family Life had 335 graduates and 13,033 enrollments—this represents an incredible 163% increase since 2018. Here are a few other numbers from last year we think you might find interesting.

**93** **Faculty Scholarly Articles**  
The School of Family Life's emphasis on scholarly excellence continues to hold strong as numerous faculty publish their works in top-tier academic journals.

**159** **Gerontology Minors**  
The School of Family Life's newest minor continues to attract many students from a variety of academic disciplines.

**43** **Full-time SFL Faculty**  
Since 2018 the School of Family Life has been privileged to welcome eight new full-time faculty members. This reflects a 23% increase.

**892** **School of Family Life Majors**  
The School of Family Life offers degrees for both undergraduate (Family Studies, Family Studies: Human Development, and Family & Consumer Sciences Education) and graduate students (Marriage & Family Therapy and Marriage, Family, & Human Development).

**471** **School of Family Life Minors**  
The number of SFL minors continues to rise with each consecutive year—a 12% increase since 2018—allowing students of all majors the opportunity to benefit from the knowledge of the School of Family Life.

# 3 Ways Fathers Can Support Mothers After Baby's Birth

Lindsay Medaris

Most people can imagine the toll that having a newborn can have on parents. Little to no sleep, schedule adjustments, new financial burdens—the list goes on and on. Not only do mothers need to deal with these drastic changes, but their own bodies are rapidly changing (and hurting) as they adjust to postpartum life. In this transitional time, having a partner to lean on is one of the best comforts a new mother could have.

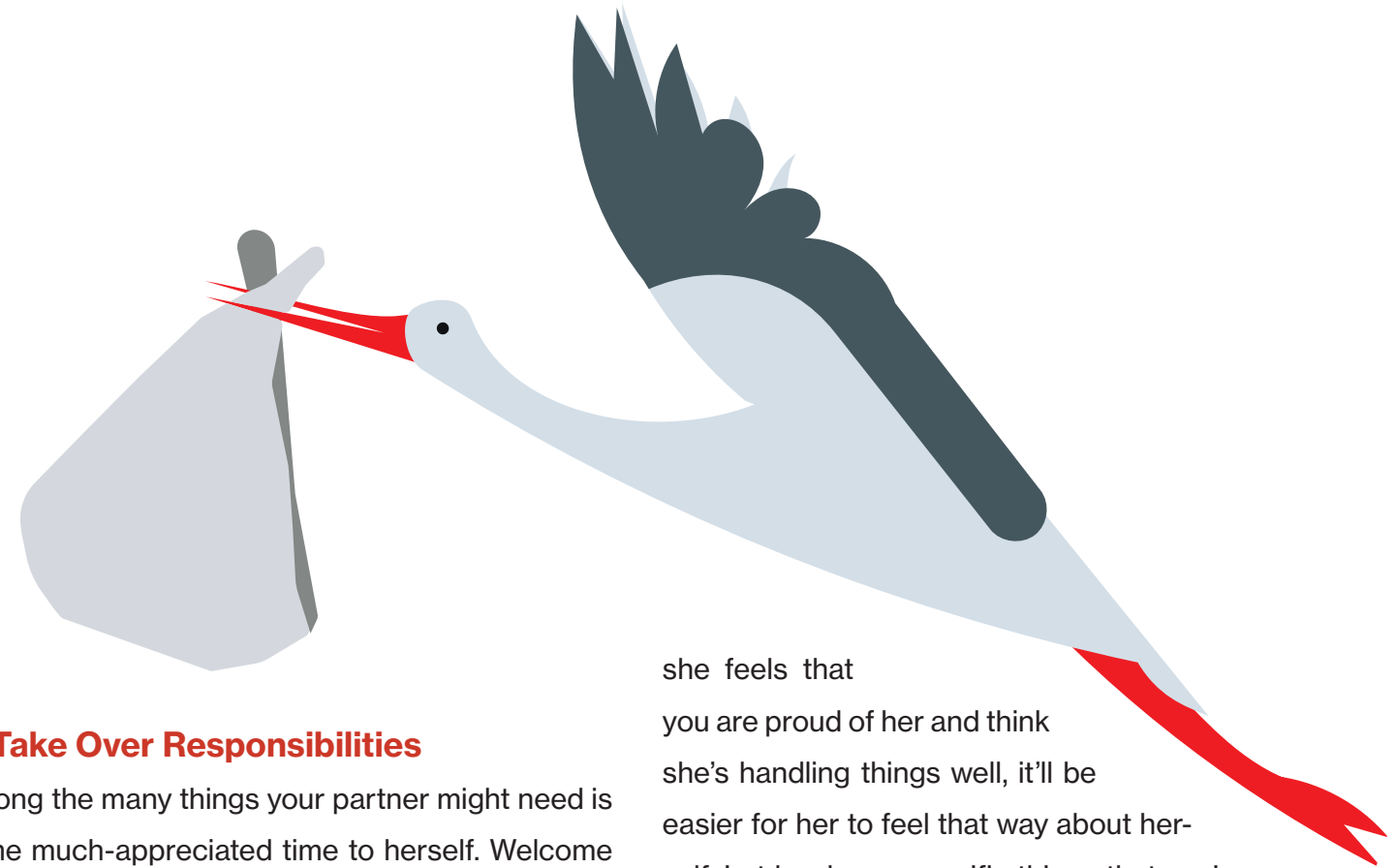
Speaking of maternal comfort, research shows that a father's support and love of his partner can actually improve their infant's development, which will certainly help the mother rest easier!<sup>1</sup> In fact, [according to a 2018 study](#), father support led to improvements in children's social, emotional, language, and cognitive development.<sup>2</sup> Fathers want to help and often wonder how they can best support and love their counterpart so the whole family can reap these great rewards.

Here are three of the best ways that fathers can support and love their significant other after having a baby. Your and your partner's needs may vary a little depending on your individual circumstances, so see how you're both feeling.

## 1. Educate Yourself on What She Needs

Most parents never feel ready for the life changes that come with having a baby. Even when you are still in the hospital, you may feel overwhelmed with all the instructions, medications, and advice that you and your partner are getting. Although it may seem like a lot, try to remember, or even write down, what the staff is telling you or your partner to do. When you feel completely unprepared as they send you home with a screaming new addition, you and your significant other will both be grateful you took note of a few instructions they gave.

Asking questions is also a great way to educate yourself. When you are unsure about anything, let the doctor or midwife know; your wife will recognize and appreciate your involvement, and you'll probably be grateful that you asked, even if it just means having peace of mind. You can also ask your partner questions about her needs. [One in five new mothers](#) experience some sort of emotional turn-for-the-worse in the first year after having a baby.<sup>3</sup> Asking your wife questions about her needs—how she's feeling or any concerns she has—will most likely mean the world to her.



## 2. Take Over Responsibilities

Among the many things your partner might need is some much-appreciated time to herself. Welcome the opportunity to soothe the baby when they're crying, feed them a bottle, or change their diaper. These moments will allow you some great one-on-one time with the baby, allowing you to feel more [connected](#)<sup>4</sup> to them and providing some important cognitive stimulation.<sup>5</sup>

Changing a diaper or doing the dishes is [essential](#) to helping your partner feel at ease and relaxed.<sup>6</sup> You can score major love points with your partner by doing something as simple as bringing her water when she sits down to feed the baby.

## 3. Encourage Her

One of the best things you can do is let your companion know that she's doing an amazing job.<sup>6</sup> If

she feels that you are proud of her and think she's handling things well, it'll be easier for her to feel that way about herself. Let her know specific things that you've noticed she is doing well: changing the baby's diapers, calming the baby down, or helping the baby to latch correctly. Additionally, there are a lot of great nonverbal ways to encourage her, such as giving her a foot massage, writing her a sweet note, or surprising her with a special gift. These gestures help her see that you recognize all her hard work, and they may be just what she needs to feel up to the challenge of the coming week.

When fathers do these three things, mothers tend to feel more of the support and love that you wish for them. Ultimately, loving and supporting your partner will help you grow closer to her and your baby. Raising a child together can be an



# Tying a Stronger Knot: Overcoming Contemporary Marital Myths

Misha D. Crawford

amazing experience for both of you as you learn to support and comfort each other during your most vulnerable times, such as after your partner

gives birth. As you take this advice and adapt it to apply to your situation, your family’s well-being will improve as a result.

## Endnotes

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**Lindsay Medaris** is from Middleton, Idaho, and is now a student at Brigham Young University. She is majoring in Human Development and will graduate in April 2023. Lindsay has been married to her best friend, Briggs, for about two years, and they recently had a baby named Ridge. She enjoys spending time with her family. They especially love hiking, camping, rappelling, and anything else outdoors.

**Lindsay Medaris**

I recently attended the wedding of a lifelong friend. Amidst the abundance of laughter, smiles, and well wishes, I couldn’t help but catch the couple’s occasional discomfort and shifting glances when a classic and seemingly inevitable “ol’ ball and chain” comment would come rolling in (no pun intended)—or a piece of pessimistic marital advice was casually dispensed by another couple standing in the reception line. Winks and elbow nudges predictably followed comments addressed to the bride or groom with a grin: “Sure you want to be stuck with him forever?” or “You still have time to run!” I questioned whether the bride would find any comfort in her aunt’s aphoristic remark: “You only get married once . . . or five or six times.”

While these commentators probably intended more fun than harm during the social occasion, I fell just short of dumbfounded at the expanse of assertions coated in the drab inevitability of failure that bombarded this young couple’s marriage before it had even begun. Though perhaps all realize these comments were said in jest, they nevertheless have an impact—coloring the feelings that many newlyweds are starting marriage with.

These harmful myths about marriage are hardly the best wedding present one could give. These negative

claims, especially when they are believed, may beget a harmful, self-fulfilling prophecy among modern marriages when knowing and acknowledging the truth of these matters would otherwise strengthen them. Here are just two of the truths that could encourage and uplift those starry-eyed couples who have the world at their doorstep.

## The Odds Are Not Against You

Negative attitudes and expectations about marriage are based largely on the myth that for every two marriages, one will end in divorce. The fear that half of marriages are doomed to fail is so prevalent that many don’t take the risk at all. While [93% of Americans say](#)<sup>1</sup> they hope to form a happy, lasting union and a majority continue to put marriage at the top of their own life goals, the proportion of [never-married Americans has risen](#)<sup>2</sup> from 21% to 35%—a 14-percentage point increase—in the last 20 years. This substantial delay and decline of marriage is [found among people of all educational backgrounds](#), though the decline is steeper among the less educated. The question today is whether the likelihood of having a happy, lasting marriage is so slim that one should think twice about marrying at all. This stereo-

type receives reinforcement from the news, media, and society as a whole. But the data do not support this public perception.

**The question today is whether the likelihood of having a happy, lasting marriage is so slim that one should think twice about marrying at all. . . . But the data do not support this public perception.**

Marriage is not a gamble. While current figures do show that 40 to 50 percent of all marriages end in divorce, this does not mean that for any given wedding, there is only a 50/50 chance that the marriage will be successful. A lasting marriage is not determined by the flip of a coin. The whole truth—the more nuanced truth—is that the risk of divorce is not uniform among couples.

The oft-quoted divorce statistic is based on *all couples everywhere*, [including those with high risk](#)

[factors](#) such as marrying at a young age, poverty, limited education, premarital cohabitation, and premarital childbearing. While some couples are statistically more likely to divorce than others, [most first marriages are low risk](#), especially among certain populations. Key factors associated with a lower risk of divorce include those who are [educated](#), [religious](#), of middle or upper [socioeconomic status](#), and those who delay marriage until [after their teen years](#). For example, one study of well-educated couples [found that fewer than 6%<sup>3</sup>](#) had divorced. The overall divorce rate is a complex estimation of the general risk of divorce for those marrying today and ultimately inflated by myriad risk factors.

Further, the divorce rate is even lower when various factors involving life decisions such as relational commitment, communication, fidelity, avoiding debt, avoiding addiction, and others are taken into account. In other words, while demographic factors matter and do decrease risk, marital success is largely agentive and dynamic. More than 80 years of research on premarital predictors of marriage outcomes have [shown that many strong predictors](#) of marital trajectories can be personally controlled and developed. Individual and couple factors such as communication skills, personal maturity, emotional readiness, forgiveness, religious devotion, sexual restraint, and the management of conflict can be learned and practiced in developing [true marital competency and readiness](#).

As social scientist Maggie Gallagher, founder of The National Organization for Marriage, said, “Just as good marriages go bad, bad marriages go good. And they have a [better chance of doing so](#) in a society that recognizes the value of marriage than one that sings the statistically dubious joys of divorce.”

The good news, then, is that a majority of risk factors can be personally controlled. And while others may

be unpreventable, relationships tend to be most successful when couples choose to focus most on what *is* in their control. Their personal commitment, sacrifice, and choice to invest in their relationship will say more for their marital success than the circumstantial or environmental factors they encounter. As each partner chooses to do their individual part to invest in their marriage daily, *the odds of a lasting marriage are in their favor*.

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Read more at <https://publicsquaremag.org/sexuality-family/tying-a-stronger-knot-overcoming-contemporary-marital-myths/>

**Misha D. Crawford** is a master’s student in the Marriage, Family, and Human Development program at Brigham Young University. She received her bachelor’s degree in Family Studies at BYU and is both a family life educator and ballroom dance instructor. Misha’s research and writing focus on marital enhancement and addiction recovery.

**Misha D. Crawford**



# Bite-Sized Wisdom From the Experts

Dr. Dean Busby



## Marital Enhancement

Did you know that practicing religion with your spouse is one of the best ways you can insulate yourself from the current negative marital trends in our world? Couples who are affiliated with religion tend to have lower divorce rates. One thing you can do to enhance your marriage is prioritize integrating religious practices and principles into your life together. Wherever you may be right now, take a step toward each other by growing closer to God.

## Healthy Sexuality

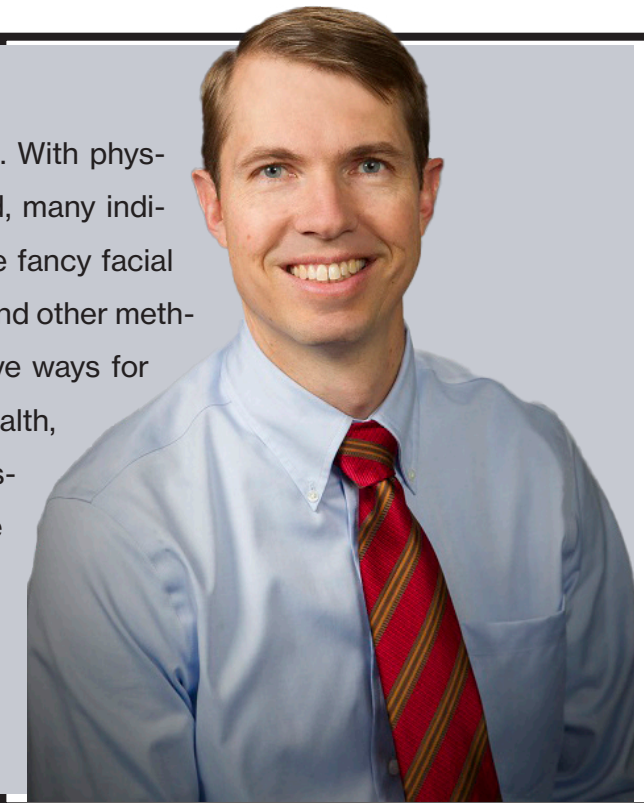
Our Heavenly Father gave us bodies for many purposes, one of which is to develop a strong, loving sexual relationship that is enjoyable to both husband and wife. Sex allows the bodies, souls, and emotions of the couple to become intertwined. Dr. Leavitt shares that the real secret to great sex is investing “work, commitment, effort, and time.” To make sex better, both husband and wife need to understand and honor their divine differences and similarities. Together, they create a sacred space for meaningful and complete intimacy.



Dr. Chelom Leavitt

## Aging

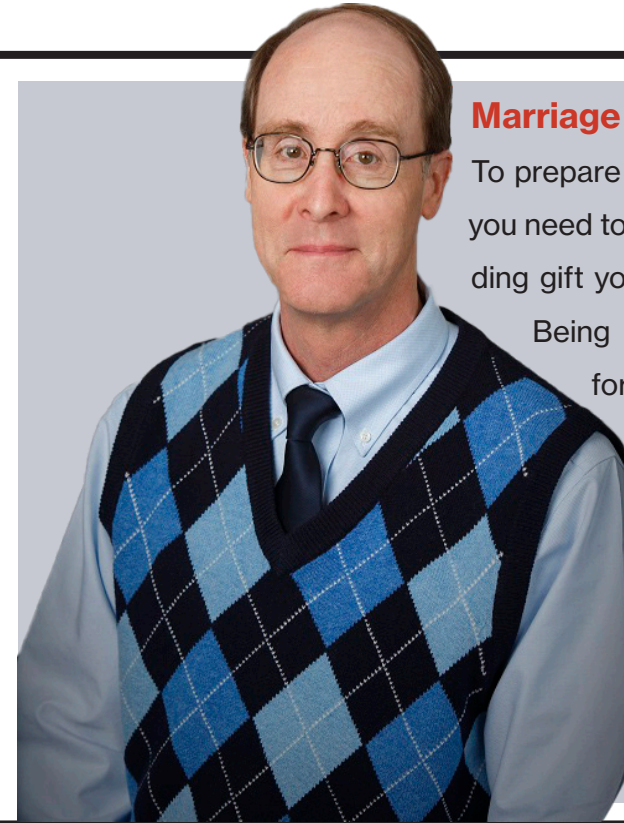
People often worry about the aging process. With physical, emotional, and cognitive changes ahead, many individuals are eager to take a “magic” pill or use fancy facial creams to stay young. While these solutions and other methods seem attractive, one of the most effective ways for you to age gracefully is to prioritize your health, specifically by exercising. Those who consistently exercise, especially those who exercise with a family member, tend to have better health, stronger memory, and longer lives. Love yourself throughout your aging experience by staying active.



Dr. Jeremy Yorgason

## Marriage Preparation

To prepare most effectively for marriage, first, accept that you need to prepare. Marriage preparation is the best wedding gift you can give to yourself and your future spouse. Being married and blending two lives isn’t intuitive for anyone. Prepare for marriage by intentionally investing in good premarital education: read books, attend a workshop, go to counseling, or use church resources. If you have a partner, talk and discuss with them how you plan to implement what you’re learning. This will help you develop the habit and mindset of working together on your relationship.



Dr. Alan Hawkins



# Did You Know?

## There is a place for everyone in the School of Family Life

### Diversity & Unity

*SFL Commitment to Diversity, Inclusion, and Unity*

Last February, the School of Family Life affirmed its commitment to supporting diversity and unity within the college. This move was made in response to growing concerns regarding the inclusion of racial, ethnic, and other minorities at BYU along with President Dallin H. Oaks’s call to members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints to “condemn racism by any group toward any other group.” As part of its commitment, the School of Family Life has published a list of seven ways it intends to support diversity, inclusion, and unity on an institutional level. These include establishing an SFL-specific diversity, inclusion, and unity committee as well as financially supporting and conducting research on diverse families.



For more information on the School of Family Life's commitment statement, visit <https://bit.ly/SFLUnity>

### Research for All

*Dr. Andrea Busby*

Students in the School of Family Life are encouraged to seek out research opportunities as a means of furthering their education. Research allows both students and faculty to contribute to our ever-growing knowledge of families. Several current research projects are making strides to help us better understand family processes within diverse communities. Dr. Andrea Busby, professor in the School of Family Life, is currently researching how the type of community a child grows up in might influence his or her opportunities in life. Specifically, she and her assistants are examining how growing up in an urban community as opposed to a suburban community affects a child’s access to healthcare, education, and economic and social opportunities. The conclusions drawn from this study may help us better understand how different communities contribute to different children’s outcomes as well as inform future policy aimed at supporting underprivileged children.

For more information on this and similar research projects in the School of Family Life, visit <https://familylife.byu.edu/research-interests>



### Encanto & Familismo

*Dr. Jocelyn Wikle*

Have you watched Disney’s *Encanto* yet? Not only is it the first full-length Disney film to have a Latina heroine, but it also depicts a multigenerational family living under one roof! But are the strong familial connections depicted in the film a reflection of real life? Dr. Jocelyn Wikle, professor in the School of Family Life, examined the relationships between Latino youth and their families in the United States. She found that Latino youth spend significantly more time with family members than youth of other ethnic groups. Specifically, Wikle found that “Latino youth spend about 163 minutes per day with a parent” and that “time spent with siblings [is] also higher for Latino youth.” Spending time with family can strengthen youths’ sense of belonging and has even been shown to reduce parent-adolescent conflict. As such, Wikle recommends that all parents “try and foster open communication to build understanding and resolve stress on children.”



To read the full article on Wikle’s study, visit <https://bit.ly/3xMayJc>

### Belonging for the LGBTQ+ Community

*Joey Sheppard and Dr. Sarah Coyne*

As alumni, how can we make church a space of belonging for people of different communities? In a recent episode of the *Listen, Learn & Love* podcast, Dr. Sarah Coyne and Joey Sheppard express their collective desire to answer this question, with a focus on members of the LGBTQ+ community. Coyne, professor in the School of Family Life, explains that while membership in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints may foster feelings of belonging for some, the cultures of particular wards may exclude individuals whose experiences or identities differ from the majority. As graduate student Joey Sheppard explains, this project is “an opportunity for . . . people like me to share our stories . . . the good and the bad.” Through interviewing current and former members of the Church who are part of the LGBTQ+ community, Coyne and Sheppard hope to help members “create better spaces of belonging” at church for members of the LGBTQ+ community and potentially combat rates of suicidality among LGBTQ+ members of the Church.

To learn more about the project as well as the personal and spiritual experiences that motivate Coyne and Sheppard to research this topic, visit:

<https://bit.ly/3HH7jrO>



# We are pleased to announce the second edition of *Sexual Wholeness in Marriage*

The first edition of this foundational text by BYU School of Family Life professors Dean M. Busby, Jason S. Carroll, and Chelom E. Leavitt was released in 2014. The second edition will expound on and add to the existing research on how married couples can embark on a journey toward an optimal sexual relationship. The research and suggestions in this book can help couples bring together the spiritual and sexual parts of themselves to find greater wholeness individually and as a couple.

**"Tenderness and respect—never selfishness—must be the guiding principles in the intimate relationship between husband and wife."**

President Howard W. Hunter

## What new content can you expect?

Dr. Chelom Leavitt explained that the book will cover new topics, such as pregnancy, autonomy, authenticity, sexual mindfulness, body image, and more. This book unlocks the gate to more intimate relationships founded on the authors' original model of sexual wholeness, which includes spiritual, physical, and emotional dimensions. Married couples can use this book not only to learn about their sexuality but also to become one with the God-given gift of sexuality that binds husbands and wives together in pure bliss and happiness. Dr. Leavitt says,

"Sexuality is a perplexing and rewarding area of life, particularly for spiritually minded individuals. The *Sexual Wholeness in Marriage* book presents a step-by-step map to building positive sexual attitudes and a healthy sexual relationship in your marriage. This book presents ideas about how enriching sex is emotional, spiritual, and physical."

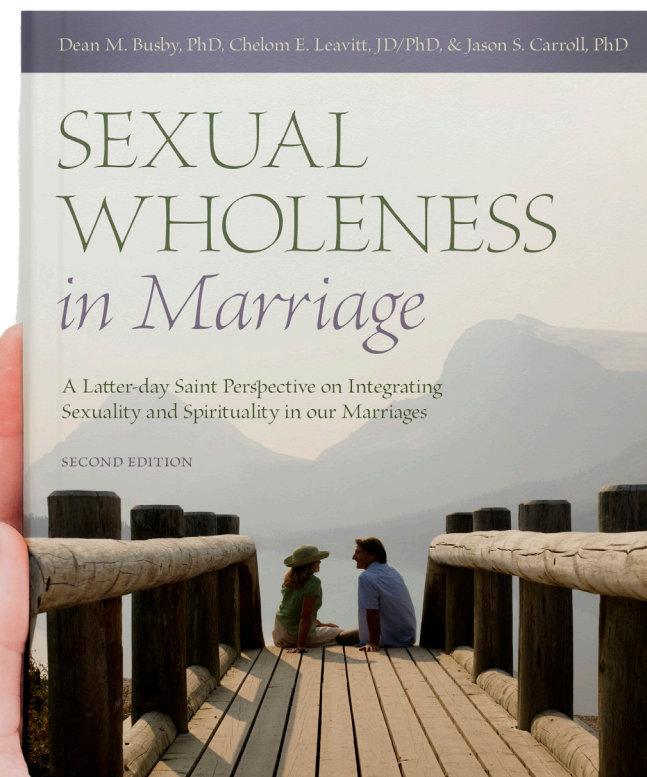


What are the **unique** sexual needs of women and men in marriage?

How can couples be better prepared to start off their marriage **on the right foot** when they are sexually inexperienced?

How can couples manage their often very different levels of interest in sex?

What types of sexual behaviors are appropriate for **married members** of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints?



How can couples keep their sexual relationship **creative and enjoyable** over decades of marriage?

**COMING  
FALL 2022**



# Family Perspectives

*Do you wonder how attachment styles, childhood disabilities, and media use are affecting families today?*



Check out *Family Perspectives*, the School of Family Life’s publication on current issues influencing families! Articles are written by students and available to everyone worldwide at <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/familyperspectives/>.

President Dallin H. Oaks directed the School of Family Life to publish family-centered research and make it available to the general public. Faculty and students are rising to the challenge by synthesizing existing research, sharing personal experiences, and conducting new studies on the family. *Family Perspectives* allows faculty and students to advocate for the strengthening of families. Authors submit their manuscripts to the journal, and student editors work with authors to prepare their work for publication.

You will find three types of articles in *Family Perspectives*:

**Academic Reviews**

Academic Reviews analyze current research articles and integrate their findings into new ideas and conclusions. In her article, *Effects of Parents’ Avoidant and Anxious Attachment on Children*, Nicole

Busacker explores how parental attachment styles affect children. She explains how avoidant and anxious attachment styles affect parenting, children’s social lives, and children’s emotionality and coping abilities.

**See also**

*An Exploration of Family Outcomes in Adult Children of Late-Life Divorce* by Kaitlyn Dyshkant  
*Mindfulness in University Students: A Tool for Managing Stress* by Lyndsey Kunzler

**Featured Insights**

Featured Insights allow authors to draw on both research and personal experiences to share practical advice on marriage, family, and relationships. Meghan Cawley shares her family’s experience of caring for a brother and son with cerebral palsy in her article, *Caring for Your Marriage When Your Child Has Disabilities*. She advises spouses to nurture their relationship by developing a co-parenting alliance, practicing daily self-care, and more.

**See also**

*Devices: Tools or Vices?* by Rebekah Case  
*How to Make FOMO Work for You* by Lauren Hansen  
*Loving Your Partner Enough to Give Them Space* by Dallie Johnson  
*Why You Need to Have Story Time With Your Child Today* by Lindsay Medaris

**Research Spotlights**

Research Spotlights publicize research being done by faculty and students in the School of Family Life. *Hazardous or Helpful? Media Use During Infant Feedings* highlights research done by Dr. Sarah Coyne and her associates on how parental media use during infant feedings affects children. Although many say parents should avoid media during infant

feedings, data gathered by Dr. Coyne suggest media use during feedings may actually benefit the parent-child relationship. There are over 50 articles for you to read in *Family Perspectives*. Head over to the website and see how the research and insights there can strengthen you and your family.





# The *Family Perspectives Podcast*

While attending BYU, you likely heard time and time again that your education should lead to “lifelong learning and service.” Now that you’ve graduated, how can you engage in ongoing learning and stay connected to powerful, relevant knowledge stemming from the School of Family Life? The *Family Perspectives Podcast* is a great place to start!

## What is the *Family Perspectives Podcast*?

The *Family Perspectives Podcast* is a series created by students and faculty in the School of Family Life for current BYU students, alumni, and anyone desiring to strengthen their family and learn valuable relationship skills. Season 1 of the podcast spotlights SFL professors by inviting them to share their professional background and current research. Season 2 provides applicable tips for listeners to enhance their own relationships, with each episode focusing on a different relational theme.

## What is the purpose of this podcast?

In our digital age, many people turn to the internet, Instagram, TikTok, and a variety of other online media platforms for advice on parenting, relationships, and more. This podcast was created to add to those digital materials as a reliable source of family-focused research and education from the School of Family Life.

## Why should I listen to it?

The *Family Perspectives Podcast* is a fun, convenient way to continue learning family life principles you

can use on a daily basis. The podcast format makes it easy to learn new things on the go—on your commute to work, as you check errands off your list, or while you wind down at the end of the day.

## Where can I find this podcast?

The *Family Perspectives Podcast* is free to stream on Spotify, Apple Podcasts, and almost any other platform where podcasts are found.

## What’s new in Season 2?

Season 2, which started in January 2022, is all about how you can improve your relationship IQ! This season aims to provide you with relevant relationship tips taught by faculty experts and scholars from each respective area of family life and human development. Each episode focuses on a different relational topic, such as dating, marriage, or parenting.

## What can we look forward to this year?

This year, monthly topics focus on how to improve your relationship IQ in the areas of marital enhancement, dating, parenting, healthy sexuality, communication, media use, conflict resolution, finances, mental health, and other topics studied by experts in the School of Family Life.

### Connect with us!

Email [byusflpodcast@gmail.com](mailto:byusflpodcast@gmail.com) with any questions or requests for topics you would like to hear covered on the podcast.

# Generous Giving

## Annie Nielson

Annie Nielson came to BYU unsure of where her education would take her, which is why she chose a degree in the School of Family Life. Pursuing an education in the SFL department allowed her to explore a variety of topics and eventually form a passion for helping women and children. Annie is now a junior majoring in Human Development with a minor in Global Women’s Studies. In the future, she hopes her SFL education

will lead her to a career in sex and marriage therapy or healthy sexuality education and volunteer work in organizations that promote women’s and children’s human rights.

For now, Annie’s education is taking her to the United Kingdom, thanks to the generous donations of alumni like you. She was selected as the recipient of the School of Family Life Experiential Learning Grant, which has paved the way for Annie to participate in a study abroad program. On this trip, she will visit Wales, England, Ireland, and Scotland, where she will have the opportunity to interact with several organizations and sites devoted to women’s rights. This unique opportunity will move Annie one step closer to her passion for furthering women’s rights.

To donors like you, Annie expressed the following:

“This scholarship and donation has allowed me not only to continue on a steady track with my education but has also given me the opportunity to expand my education, knowledge, and experience beyond the classroom walls of BYU. It is a new perspective and journey that I would never have been able to gain without the help and support of others. For that reason, I am eternally grateful for the generosity of those who have donated, giving me and many other students the once-in-a-lifetime chance to see the world and learn from it.”

To help students like Annie expand their education on and off campus, visit [give.byu.edu/fhss](https://give.byu.edu/fhss)



# **BYU School of Family Life**

SFL Alumni Magazine

2086 Joseph F. Smith Building

Brigham Young University

Provo, Utah 84602



Photo by Nate Edwards © BYU Photo

*“Seek ye out of the best books words of wisdom; seek learning, even by  
study and also by faith.”*

D&C 88:118