COVID has certainly had a great deal of impact on a global scale - from travel and business, to health and relationships. As clinicians, one of the most common experience that we are experiencing is that our clients' acuity level and severity of symptomology is increasing. I am seeing the same in my work within relationships - marital and primary relationships are hurting, and they are hurting to a degree and severity level that I've not seen before. One recurring theme that I am coming across in my work within strained relationships is that the division of labor has changed significantly for couples. Now that some are working in part or in whole at home, how tasks are managed seems to be shifting. Beyond only work, household maintenance, and general child-rearing, many couples are also facing integration of school into their daily lives. A division of labor that made sense for many couples pre-pandemic no longer serves them very well in COVID-times.

The division of physical and emotional labor in each household is often a difficult task (even before COVID), and is an area that clinicians are not immune. Knowing that we as clinicians manage this need within our own relationships while also helping others to do the same, I wanted to share some tips for clinicians. Whether you share them with your own clients who are struggling in their relationships, or they are of use to you personally, my hope is that we can identify some methods to gain some relief and support:

1. Do some self-scanning. How are you feeling about how tasks are divided in your home? How do you feel you and your partner are doing with dividing up those tasks equitably? Do you feel appreciated and seen for the effort you are putting forward to keep your family running right now? If you are feeling positively about these things, I hope you take a moment to share that with your partner - they should hear it. If you are feeling negatively about them, consider the following...

   a. Have a direct conversation about the division of labor with your partner. How have things changed in the pandemic (if at all)? What tasks have you taken on that you are finding work for you? How about those tasks that you are finding are a struggle for you? Try and ascertain if your partner feels similarly to you or differently from you about how tasks are divided.

   b. Consider a list of tasks. From groceries, laundry, dishes, and dusting, to homework, school structure, and your own jobs... there is a lot that you undoubtedly do to keep your family afloat. Think about being very overt about what all of those tasks are and establishing a list. Although not every item on that list is weighted the same (naturally), thinking through all of those things means that you are also going to be naturally having the conversation of who completes those tasks now as well as who ideally will complete those tasks moving forward. Consider having a list of all of your tasks, with which you and your partner independently evaluate how that list gets tackled. Now compare. Where do changes seem necessary? What is working?
2. Articulate appreciations often. The majority of folks are expressing feelings of being overwhelmed right now. You can make sure your partner knows that their efforts are seen and appreciated. Taking that a step further, the more you do this for your partner, the more likely they are to reciprocate.

3. Don't be afraid to make changes. Perhaps you were previously the primary working partner, while your significant other was the one to ensure that things like dishes and laundry were done - now that COVID has altered those realities, this may no longer be the case. Perhaps your partner's career lends itself to more time and more money during COVID than yours and those roles have shifted. Perhaps you have both changed where your priorities lie in terms of when those tasks get done. Don't be afraid of changing things up and changing them again if need be. No change in your relationship has to be permanent, and you will do yourselves a great service if you can modify things as needed, then reconvene to assess how that change is working for you both.

I don't know if it helps anyone reading this to know that you are not alone, but you most certainly aren't. There is a lot that is changing for us as clinicians and as partners in our own relationships, and it is difficult to navigate. And just in case you don't hear it enough - I hear you, I see you, and you're killing it. Keep going.