

GUIDELINES & INFORMATION FOR COUPLES COUNSELING

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1. People come to counseling not to “change”, but to be understood and to be told that they are “okay”. Change comes later.
2. Counselor should be an “ally” to both people. Pay equal attention to both.
3. Counselor should make it clear that you can help them work through and learn new ways of handling their conflict. Give them confidence in you. The interactional process is important. The couple needs to feel that the counselor is strong and able to take charge of the process. They come to therapy feeling chaotic.
4. Both have to work at helping the relationship; things don't change fast; expect a lot of emotions in the beginning from the couple.
5. Therapist should be aware of countertransference; therapist should be aware of their own feelings and not transfer feeling to clients such as anger, sadness etc.
6. Basic Energy: Fear = moving away from others; Anger = against another; love = toward another; love & fear = push / pull dynamic
7. Therapy should explore: myths, expectations, roles, identities, hidden agendas.

LISTENING SKILLS AND EXPLORING:

1. Verbal - What is Said (gives meaning)
2. Vocal - How it's said (tone, loud, soft, etc.) — clue as to underlying feelings
3. Physical expressions, body, facial — clue as to wants or intentions or themes
4. Counselor needs to show clients understanding of: Dynamics, Feelings, Intentions, Goals, and Needs
5. Make tentative statements of Understanding what you heard. Ex:
“So, in other words what you are saying is...”
“If I understand what you are saying it is...”
6. If client says my problem is “my husband had an affair” Help client identify and state their own reaction to the problem — their feelings, beliefs, expectations — have them make “I” statements and own their feelings.

MODEL OF COUPLES COUNSELING:

1. Listen to each client - their needs, wants, intentions — these are typically not spoken - and encourage clients to listen to one another.
2. Work towards having clients speak to each other directly with you facilitating or being someone's "alter-ego".
3. Encourage client's reaction to other client's awareness.
4. Sensing / thoughts / actions / feelings / intention — identify each of these.
5. Identify: What they want for self
What they want from relationship and other person
What they want from the counselor

Also find out what they "desire" / what they expect / what their acceptance will be.

DISCUSS JOHARI WINDOW

STEPS:

1. Problem identification make contact with all members (summarize what you hear)
2. Affective reaction to the problem
3. Ask: what do you need? How can I help?
4. Identify communication blocks; Also identify different styles; different needs 1 wants / desires / purposes intentions / roles / sexuality / values / expectations / spiritual framework / and style of handling conflict / anger
5. Is one a people pleaser / another an aggressor?
6. Mentor and role model GOOD COMMUNICATION — take on the role of husband or wife and role model with them how to do it.
7. Move couples toward a WIN-WIN; NOT a win — lose; or a lose — lose
8. Use scale of 1-10 in assessing their connection to each other in the following areas:
 - a. Socially; sexually, spiritually, personally, lifestyle, occupationally, emotionally, intellectually, etc.

9. Be aware of their difference and their connections and put this on a flip chart for them to see. Visual diagrams are very powerful.
10. Discuss and facilitate how they can achieve a win-win with their differences.
11. When each person feels understood in their position by you and by their spouse — healing will have begun.
12. No matter what one person has done (i.e., had an affair, beat their spouse, etc.) **HOLD OFF JUDGMENT!!** You will need to find out what pain point propelled them to act in this manner and facilitate healing from that point. **NEVER PASS JUDGMENT UNTIL YOU KNOW THE WHOLE STORY IF YOU DO IT MEANS YOU ARE TAKING SIDES. YOU CAN DISLIKE THE BEHAVIOR, BUT DON'T DISLIKE THE PERSON — IT WILL AFFECT YOUR ABILITY TO HELP.**
13. Always discuss and have them come up with solutions to their **UNDERLYING PROBLEM OR ROLE** — your job is to identify it and then have them process a solution; you can add your solutions after they have come up with their own.

AREAS TO INVESTIGATE WITH COUPLES:

Level of commitment
 Initial marital expectations and present expectation
 Individual perceptions of the problems / and their individual backgrounds
 Self esteem levels
 Short- and long-range goals for the marriage
 Relationship Rules
 Myths
 Relationship and Family dynamics
 Communication Patterns
 Value Systems
 Roles (parent, little girl, helpless male etc.)
 Time Structures
 Strengths (individual and couple)
 Collection of resentments *****
 Responsibilities and decision-making process
 Sex
 Intimacy levels
 Ways of fighting
 Problem solving skills — ability to compromise
 Fear areas

Expectations
Levels of stress — individually and in relationship
Empowerment — depowerment
Manipulation
Finances
Defenses / Gatekeepers

OTHER IDEAS:

1. Can have couple physically represent their relationship by holding each other in a particular position
2. Have couples bring a notebook and take notes during the session.
3. Give couples homework assignments
4. Have them read a book together (out loud) to each other.
5. Have them discuss their style of grieving —if needed
6. Use them to role model a parent if needed
7. Give them an assignment to talk during the week and hold hands during the 1/2-hour self therapy session.
8. Help the couple find areas of agreement / areas of responsibility.
9. Typically, men use sex to achieve emotional intimacy; typically, women need emotional intimacy to have sex.

INFORMATION ABOUT ROLES:

1. Much of our ability to develop positive relationships with the opposite sex depends upon the roles we choose for ourselves or allow ourselves to play.
2. Roles e play can limit the level of communication we achieve with one another
3. Playing roles can limit the extent of our own self-development.
4. Living a role can Limit our sensitivity to and aware of feelings, both our own and others.
5. Role playing can dictate how much freedom we allow ourselves and how much independence we allow others.
6. Roles can affect our ability to fulfill or satisfy both our own needs and those of our partners.

TIMING:

1. Be aware of the ego strength of each person and how much feedback they can take from you.

2. Be very aware of when to say WHAT...timing is everything. You might know something about the couple, but need to wait to say it for several sessions if they are too high in conflict to completely hear it.

"What if I should discover that the poorest of the beggars and the most imprudent of all offenders are all within me. That I stand in need of the alms of my own kindness. That I, myself, am the enemy which should be loved...What then?"

Carl Jung