



INFORMED CONSENT FOR COUPLES COUNSELING

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Counseling is a collaborative endeavor requiring mutual commitment and participation. Couples therapy is a process of identifying interaction and communication patterns that are negatively impacting the friendship, intimacy, and fulfillment of needs of one or both partners.

PARTNER EXPECTATIONS

Each partner will be expected to honestly examine their own interaction and communication styles, identify and express their own vulnerabilities, and make an attempt at experimenting with alternative methods of communicating and interacting. Each partner will be helped to further clarify their own values and their own level of commitment to the relationship, and the outcome of the therapy may be increased satisfaction with the partnership or increased clarity about the decision to part ways.

COUNSELING APPROACH

My therapy style integrates principles from psychodynamic theory, interpersonal neurobiology, attachment theory, emotion focused counseling, collaborative couples counseling, and the Gottman method, and I tailor my approach to best suit the needs of each couple.

As a Marriage and Family Therapist, I view the couple as my primary client. I am working for the relationship as well as the health and well-being of the individuals within that relationship. I will remain an unbiased partner with you throughout this process. However, I am also committed to protecting you and your partner's individual privacy. I realize that therapy can only take place in a setting in which everyone feels secure in the knowledge that his or her thoughts and feelings matter and will remain protected and secure within the confines of the therapy office. To protect your privacy, I have put the following policies into effect regarding couples counseling.

HANDLING OF INDIVIDUAL PRIVACY ISSUES IN COUPLES COUNSELING

Issues concerning personal privacy and professional confidentiality are somewhat more complicated when working with couples. In addition to the exceptions to confidentiality outlined in the individual informed consent form, work with couples sometimes requires certain additional compromises in privacy.

For example, part of our couples work may require that I meet individually with you and at other times individually with your spouse or partner. While I typically desire full disclosure in a relationship, there may be times when you or your partner and I have agreed to keep certain information protected from the other partner. There is a tendency to feel betrayed when it is later learned that this information was withheld.

This is a part of the nature of working with couples to cultivate safety, trust, and approach sensitive challenges. Thus, we will all be walking through a complicated maze of agreements and private communications.

Some therapists attempt to get around this complication by making blanket rules that I believe do not best serve the couples I work with. For example, some therapists have a “no secrets policy.” These therapists say that everything and anything they hear in therapy will be shared with the other partner. First, I believe it is not the role of the therapist to relay information from one partner to the next. In addition, I believe this creates a barrier in therapy. It may promote one partner withholding information which, if known, may alter the direction that I as a therapist may choose to pursue with you.

Other therapists avoid this problem by requiring that all therapy sessions are attended in their entirety by both partners, thereby avoiding the possibility of one partner sharing information that the other partner is unaware of. In such situations, if one partner cannot make it to a session, the session may be used to work on individual issues. I maintain a belief that by having all relevant information, disclosed and otherwise, the therapist is in a better position to help the couple experience rapid and lasting progress.

HANDLING OF INDIVIDUAL PRIVACY COMPLICATIONS

With this flexibility, certain inevitable confidentiality complications arise. What are some of the complications that can arise from this policy? I might uncover or discover secrets about you or your partner that the other of you is unaware of. For example, I might learn that (a) your partner had an affair that is now ended; (b) is still having an affair and wants help ending it, or (c) is still having an affair and has no intention of ending it.

While we may initiate marital counseling with a variety of issues present, it is my policy to discontinue couples treatment if one partner is actively engaged in an affair and is withholding this information. I understand this may result in the information not being shared, but I hold the belief that productive couples therapy will not occur while an active affair is being kept a secret.

SUMMARY

In brief, my policy concerning private communication is that I reserve the right to withhold from you or your partner information that I learn from you or your partner during individual therapy sessions. My commitment to each of you is to assist you in having the kind of relationship you desire. In addition, I strive for couples to develop transparent, honest, and trusting relationships.

Your signature below indicates that you have read the information in this document and agree to abide by its terms during our professional relationship.

Client Name (Please Print)

Client's Signature

Date