



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 preference in theoretical orientation lies in an integrated approach using reality therapy, the Gottman approach to couples counseling and structural family therapy. I will pull knowledge and techniques from each approach depending on the personality of the client and the issues that need to be addressed. There is no one approach that works best for all issues and all people. Therefore, it is more effective to be able to access a variety of approaches.

Reality therapy posits that we are all born with five innate needs. The five needs are survival, love and belonging, power, independence and freedom, and fun. The most important need is different for each individual, but all needs must be met to some extent. Each person starts building a quality world from the day they are born. All of the experiences that make us feel good and satisfy a need, whether we saw something on television or observed others, go into our quality world. All subsequent behaviors are meant to satisfy one of our innate needs and bring us closer to making our quality world a reality. Since we need other people in order to satisfy our needs, people are the most important part of our quality world, and therefore, so are relationships.

Structural family therapy views relationships as structures made up of interactional patterns that must complete tasks guided by rules, roles, and expectations. The family's role is to meet the needs of each member, which is attempted through interactions that then become patterns. Relational patterns define the system and subsystems, so as relationships move from dysfunctional to functional, needs and interactions change. Needs and interactions also change with the shifting of life cycle stages and other transitional situations. The ultimate goal is to ensure that the family structural process is meeting the needs of all members of the family by helping the family understand and become aware of its boundaries, patterns, and rules. This takes a lot of flexibility and adaptability on the part of the individual family members.

With Gottman Method Couples Therapy, we focus on emotion, skill building for managing conflict, developing new skills for enhancing friendship, and helping you to create a system of shared meaning in your relationship together.

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.

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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 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.

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Client Name (Please Print)

Client's Signature

Date