

Couples Process and Checklist



Disclaimers:

- 1) Direct and directive - your relationship is too important for anything less.
- 2) This is not meandering, aimless therapy. Time line is required.
 - a. Ticking clock creates a sense of urgency
 - b. Protects you from bad days
- 3) Only one elephant in the room.
- 4) It's all about the truth of the relationship.
- 5) Four circumstances under which couple's therapy will not work:
 - a. Psych issue – untreated
 - b. Addiction - untreated
 - c. Domestic violence in last 6 months and unaddressed
 - d. 3rd person - undisclosed
- 6) No secrets: individual communications between sessions will always be disclosed.
- 7) Just because your relationship becomes healthy doesn't mean you'll decide to stay together.

The process:

Working from the ground up and the top down (psycho education AND psychodynamics)

1. Structure, mechanics, verbiage, boundaries
 - a. Stress vs. Predictability
 - i. No fly zones
 - ii. Daily check in – 10mins
 - iii. Decompression time
 - iv. Weekly arena time (60mins)/ Relationship Gym
 1. A healthy relationship is NOT the absence of conflict, but how it's processed.
 - a. The relationship gym. Good work outs are tough.
 - b. Tao Te Ching: "If you want to shrink something..."
 - b. Rainbows & Unicorns – Date night
2. Family of Origin
 - a. Disarming hostilities
 - b. NOT license for bad behavior
3. Understanding neurobiology of the brain
 - a. Prefrontal cortex, Limbic system and other structures involved in emotions
 - b. Anger is an important emotion
4. Aircraft Carriers vs. Jet Skis
 - a. Honor the time line and process
 - b. Harmony Cycle
 - i. Momma Said There'd Be Days Like This
 - ii. Irreconcilable Differences
 1. Dragon's Teeth

5. Be your best self NOW. Don't wait for partner to "get fixed."
 - a. Watch out for confirmation bias and hostage holding
 - i. Healthy behavior can mimic old, unhealthy behavior
 - ii. Announce distinctions
 - iii. Celebrate triumphs
6. Haves and Have Nots
 - a. "I love my partner because _____"
 - b. "In order for me to be happy in this relationship, I must have _____"
 - i. Create deliverables: reasonable, specific, tangible.
 1. No one pays for a deliverable

The checklist:

- 1) Feedback wheel
 - a. "I" statements only
 - i. "you" is a fist of blame
 - ii. "I" is an invitation to understanding and ownership of self
 - iii. Do not tell your partner what he/she is thinking or feeling
 - b. Check timing
 - c. Stay on topic
 - d. Resolved for any outcome
 - e. Make a request
- 2) Listening/being heard
 - a. Just because you listen does NOT mean you agree.
 - i. Stay disciplined and repeat what you hear regardless of what you think of accuracy of what's being said.
 - b. It's okay to ask what is on the menu
 - i. What kind of listening does your partner want?
 1. Is this a venting about a topic other than us?
 2. Do you want active listening?
 - c. Active listening
 - i. Set yourself aside
 - ii. Assume good will
 - iii. Be curious
 - iv. Give gratitude
 - v. Ask to stay "caught up" if your partner is moving quickly
 - d. Until you occupy space in the other person, he/she is not truly heard.
 - i. You can NOT occupy space in your partner while defending, explaining, blaming, etc.
- 3) Tone
 - a. Don't go to the dance unless your dressed for it
 - c. Hand vs. Hammer
- 4) Boundaries
 - a. Internal
 - i. Shame vs. guilt
 - ii. connected and protected

- b. External
 - i. No fly zones
 - eg. No bringing up charged topics at bed time
 - ii. Save it for Sunday
 - iii. Positive zone only
 - iv. Going to bed angry
 - v. Stay on topic
- 5) Broken window theory of applied to relationships
- 6) Seek the arena/ Relationship Gym
 - a. The Bronco's never win on Sundays
 - i. Don't wait for the big issue
 - ii. Boiling the frog
- 7) Agreements for calling out negative behavior
 - a. How to enlist your partner without outsourcing the responsibility to your partner for your better behavior.
- 8) Relationship grid
 - a. Knowing where you are when triggered
 - b. Knowing where your partner goes when triggered
- 9) Expectations into agreements / contracting
 - a. NO text or email on relational issues
 - i. "This deserves a conversation"
- 10) Time outs
 - a. Acknowledgement of the timeout
 - b. Promise of return
 - i. Renegotiate if needed
 - c. No parting grenades
- 11) Do overs (they worked in 3rd grade and still work today)
- 12) Apologies that recognize big picture and past wounds
- 13) Accepting apology and still being angry
 - a. Ice pack
 - b. Not license for vindictiveness or passive aggressiveness
 - c. Do not offend from the victim position
- 14) Forgiveness:
 - a. Willingness to give up power
 - b. Understanding the Bob Marley principle
 - c. Understanding Shoes off in the House principle
 - d. Does NOT indicate that everything is "okay" now and return to unwanted behaviors
- 15) Losing moves
 - a. Needing to be right
 - b. Needing to control
 - c. Unbridled self-expression
 - d. Withdrawal
 - e. Retaliation
 - f. Hostage holding to past selves
 - g. Black and white thinking

16) Winning strategies

- a. Time out
- b. Reconnect with frontal cortex
- c. Offering forgiveness
- d. Offering apology
- e. Demonstrating your occupancy of your partner's position/experience
- f. Recognize and praise
- g. Reporting on yourself
- h. Maintaining boundaries

17) Core Negative/Positive Image

- a. When you do/say _____ I think of you as _____
 - i. Positives and negatives