

# 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. Accountability
  - b. Protects you from bad days
- 3) Only one elephant in the room.
- 4) It's all about the truth of the relationship.
- 5) Three circumstances under which I will not work: 3<sup>rd</sup> party, untreated addiction or psych issue.
- 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:

- a. Working from the ground up and the top down (psycho education AND psychodynamics)
  - i. Mechanics, verbiage, boundaries
    1. Reduces stress: pinch & burn
  - ii. Understanding wounds and Family of Origin
    1. Disarming all hostilities
    2. Not license for bad behavior
  - iii. Understanding neurobiology of the brain
    1. Limbic system and frontal cortex relationship
    2. Anger is an important emotion
- b. Aircraft Carriers vs. Jet Skis
  - i. Honor time-line and process
  - ii. The harmony cycle
    1. Mamma Said There'd Be Days Like This
  - iii. Be your best you now. Don't wait for your partner to "get fixed"
  - iv. Watch for confirmation bias and hostage holding
    1. Healthy behavior can mimic old, unhealthy behavior
    2. Announce distinctions
    3. Celebrate triumphs

## 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. 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?
- b. 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
- c. 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
  - a. The Bronco's never win on Sundays
    - i. Don't wait for the big issue
    - ii. Boiling the frog
- 7) Relationship grid
  - a. Knowing where you are when triggered
  - b. Knowing where your partner goes when triggered
- 8) Expectations into agreements / contracting
  - a. NO text or email on relational issues
    - i. "This deserves a conversation"
- 9) Time outs
  - a. Acknowledgement of the timeout
  - b. Promise of return
    - i. Renegotiate if needed
  - c. No parting grenades
- 10) Apologies that recognize big picture and past wounds
- 11) 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
- 12) 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

13) 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

14) 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

15) Core Negative/Positive Image

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