

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) Three circumstances under which I will not work: 3rd 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
 - a. No fly zones
 - b. Arena time (60 mins/wk)
 - i. Not a fight; no one "wins"
 - ii. Relationship gym. Good work outs are tough
 - c. Rainbows & Unicorns
 2. Disarming all hostilities
 3. Not license for bad behavior
 - ii. Understanding wounds and Family of Origin
 1. Limbic system and frontal cortex relationship
 2. Anger is an important emotion
 - 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
 2. Irreconcilable differences
 - a. Dragon's teeth
 - 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
- c. "Must have's " and Deliverables
 - i. Reasonable, specific and tangible
 - ii. 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. 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) Agreements for calling out negative 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