

**Basic Principles of Couple's Counselling**

What to do and what not to do!

**Common Misunderstandings**

- *If you let the couple talk, they will sort out their problems*
  - Lack of structure and clear goals leads to wandering discussions that do not create progress
- *Only teaching a couple communication skills will stop their conflict*
  - Communication skills are important but tend to get forgotten when couples are emotionally upset

**Common Misunderstandings**

- *If the couple can approach their problems rationally they will sort them out*
  - That is true to some extent, but in relationship emotions tend to overpower rational thinking
- *Insight into their problems will create change*
  - Insight is important but if a couple do not change their day-to-day attitudes and behavior they will stay stuck

**Common Misunderstandings**

- *Giving advice and telling a couple what to do will solve their problems*
  - Couple will try to follow advice but its impact and influence soon fades
- *If couples would only try harder, they'd get past their difficulties*
  - Couples have already tried their best, so admonitions to try harder only makes them feel like failures

## Couple's Counselling Skills

- Have a plan and focus for each session
  - Choose particular aspects of the relationship to attend to and facilitate at least one specific growth area
- Take charge and keep the session on course
  - Do not get side-tracked or 'swept away' by emotional reactions

## Couple's Counselling Skills

- Calm excessive emotional intensity
  - Do not let the couple rant, bicker, criticize or attack each other; allow space for sadness but not histrionic reactions
- Make sure each person gets equal time
  - Do not let one partner dominate the discussion; do not let one partner stay silent or passive

## Couple's Counselling Skills

- Emphasize the positives as well as the problems
  - Recognize what is going right as well as what needs to change
- Help the couple listen to and understand each other
  - Each person needs to feel as if his or her point of view is heard and acknowledged

## Couple's Counselling Skills

- Help couples come to their own solutions
  - Avoid giving advice; offer alternatives to help the couple problem solve and decide for themselves
- Teach relational skills and practice them during the session
  - Facilitate concrete changes in attitudes and actions; give homework exercises to practice between sessions