

Preparing for a Couples Counselling Session

Essential Self-Management Skills

Why should we prepare?

- Couple's counselling is mentally and emotionally demanding
- Couples bring powerful emotions and relational dynamics into the session
- One partner may be antagonistic, challenging or withdrawn
- The couple's dynamics can stir up our own unresolved relationship issues
- If unprepared, the counsellor can get flustered, confused and emotionally overwhelmed

Essential Self-Care Skills

- Be aware of your emotional and energetic state:
 - Am I apprehensive, excited, curious?
 - Am I centered and present?
 - Do I look forward to seeing these clients?
 - How is my energy?
- Use self-calming and self-management skills:
 - Pray
 - Meditate,
 - Breathe
 - Talk to yourself

Essential Self-Care Skills

- Take care of your physical needs:
 - Eat, drink, go to the toilet, go outside, exercise
- Take space and time between clients:
 - Give yourself permission to slow down
 - Sit quietly for a few moments doing nothing
- Seek help whenever you can:
 - Get supervision and talk to colleagues
 - Read, research and attend courses
 - Tell yourself: *I am always learning*

Review What You Know

- What do I know cognitively about this couple:
 - What is the presenting problem?
 - What are the main issues?
 - How did the last session go?
 - What did a supervisor or colleagues suggest?
- What do I feel or sense about this couple:
 - How do I feel when in session with them?
 - Which emotions do they express and what is not expressed?
 - Who is least engaged or motivated to change?
 - Is there more going on than they tell me?
 - How do I feel at the end of the session?

Make a Flexible Plan

- How should I start the session?
 - Complete the admin and paperwork
 - Gather more background information
 - Ask how they have been doing this week
 - Ask what they would like to focus on
 - Ask how they approached the homework
 - Go over themes and issues from the last session:
 - What did you find most challenging?
 - What did you find most helpful
 - Let them make the first move

Make a Flexible Plan

- What structure would work best?
 - Use a more structured approach for angry/difficult couples
 - Use a less structured approach for sadder/quieter couples
- Intervene quickly to stop manipulative or abusive communication
- Decide on useful resources—handouts, books, questionnaires
- Set goals and mark achievements in the session
- Decide on what kinds of homework to suggest