

# How Relationship Counselling Can Assist Couples

Most relationships experience a time of uncertainty and confusion. Couples may look at each other and think, "**But you are not who I thought you were!**" Or they may look at their loved one and think, "**Why did I pick you?**" All these doubts and anxieties in a relationship can lead to couples feeling very alone and fearful about their future together. It is at this point they may decide to **embark on an affair** or take up a new hobby or pastime that **creates distance** between the partners in the relationship. However they could also seek support from a couple's therapist! Coming into couple counselling at this stage of their lives could enable them to discover a different way of being together. As relationships are living entities, they have a life death cycle, which happens about every seven years. Like all living things they will be subject to 'dis ease' and ill health! It is at this point they may need the help of a third party to examine the dynamic created by the two people in the relationship! As human beings we all have **a longing to be close with another person** and yet it can seem so difficult to achieve. It does not stop the desire however and we may go from relationship to relationship in our search.

So what can we **expect from relationship counselling?** Firstly, unlike 1-1 counselling it is the relationship that is the client not the individuals. The couple are moving into a new phase, the old way of being together is gone. This is usually very painful to accept and many couples coming to therapy say they 'just want things to go back to the way they were.' But that is not possible or desirable as it no longer works! As with all endings there needs to be a period of mourning and grieving for the loss of the old relationship and counselling can facilitate this process by offering a safe environment to explore the feelings around the issues which have brought the couple to this stage. Most importantly perhaps, counselling can enable a couple to understand the **dynamic of the relationship** they have created between them. This can be a very enlightening experience but also very painful as **blaming** the other person for all that is wrong is much **easier** than owning our own part in what we create. Coming along hoping that the counsellor will 'sort out' our partner or do all the work on the relationship will lead to disappointment.

**Therapy means being willing to identify and own then let go of negative behaviour patterns.**

Those seeking couples counselling may do so only when they reach a **crisis point**. One or other of them has taken their energy and focus out of the relationship; maybe had an affair or a new baby has arrived. Alternatively **after many years together bringing up a family the couple feel like strangers**; their common ground has shifted. What ever triggers a couple to seek help, in order to gain the most from couples counselling they need to have a willingness and commitment to do the **hard work needed in relationship**. After all success in any aspect of life involves these. Relationship is no different. By understanding what makes us fall in and then out of love with our partner we are more able to manage the pitfalls and emotions of relationship. Gaining an awareness of ourselves in relation to the other person and having insight into our behaviour and how it impacts can help identify the triggers, which lead to conflict. Conversely those couples who avoid conflict all together may lack any passion or aliveness in their dynamic and feel depressed. The relationship may have more of a sibling quality about it or even parent/child type interactions.

As a contextual couples counsellor I work with whatever the couple bring in the context of their relationship. I try not to have preconceived ideas about how things should be between them. I work with what is. They may be looking to **work through a difficult time in their lives or be wanting to separate**. My role is to facilitate their needs. To support their coupledness and offer a safe and confidential space to reveal itself. I like to start by congratulating them on being there, because they are on the threshold of something different. It is exciting and scary as all change can be but it is so energising too if we can trust our partners, the counsellor and ourselves!

**For more information please contact Jenni Camplin at The Centre. 0208 466 5671**