



## **What is the difference between Couple's therapy, Marriage Therapy, Family Therapy and Pre-marriage preparation?**

The common denominator in all of these forms of therapy is the relationship. Key to all of these therapies is the importance of the interactions between people. In effect, the relationship people bring into the counseling session is the "client" when counseling couples or families. If there are individual concerns such as an addiction or a personality disorder, sometimes individual therapy for that person is encouraged with a different therapist. The rationale is that to stop the process of healing the relationship in order to attend to one or the others' individual concerns, would sidetrack the therapeutic process. Dealing with only one person in the relationship might possibly leave the others in therapy feeling overlooked and unimportant. This is not to say that the addiction cycle is not a family concern, it is just that more intensive therapy for the one experiencing the addiction is important.

On a practical level "**Couple therapy**" covers counseling with persons whose relationship requires relational healing between the two people in the relationship. . The healing may be in the form of learning new communication skills or how to do problem solving without starting an argument, or dealing with broken trust, for example

**"Marriage counseling"** is therapy with couples who are in a marriage relationship and who have found that they continue to fall into unhealthy patterns of communication. Their destructive way of relating to each other leads to problems of intimacy and feeling invalidated. Often, infidelity becomes another symptom of the unhappiness in the relationship. The couple builds walls of resentment and their big question, as they enter into therapy, is can our marriage work? The answer is: if both the husband and wife are willing to work on changing the way they relate and learn new skills, their marriage can be stronger than ever before.

**"Pre-Marriage Counseling"** is a process of assessing the couple's readiness to enter into a marriage relationship. Pre-marriage counseling is a proactive approach to building a couple's future marriage on values, skills, beliefs, and action which foster a healthy relationship. The counseling process may be through a series of sessions with a therapist where the couple talks through their expectations, communication styles and

ways of doing problem solving. Another approach is to use the Prepare/Enrich Inventory which is an on-line assessment tool. Several of our therapists are trained facilitators for this inventory. The assessment is divided into 8 topics that are both to be worked on by the couple and used as a learning tool. Topics included in the Prepare/Enrich assessment are How to do Active Listening, the forgiveness process, how to do problem solving, developing a spending plan, and dealing with the “in-laws” , expectations and the importance of intimacy.

**“Family Therapy”** brings the generations together in each session, to rebuild the relationships that have been wounded. The therapist looks at the “family system” or the dynamics of the relationships to see where there are emotional wounds within the family. Also the therapist helps the family to understand the roles that may be applied to family members which keep the family “stuck” in unhealthy patterns of relationships. Family therapy, therefore, is for many different combinations of family members such as: a single Dad and his son, or both parents and their three children, or an adult daughter with her aging mother, or a grandparent who lives with her adult son and his wife and their two children. Most of the combinations of families are the members who live together in one household, although that is not always the case.

### **“Goals for Marriage and Family Therapy”:**

The first goal is to assess where the “pain” seems to be. Is the pain the grief from the loss of a loved one? The fear of a divorce? An addiction that is out of control? An affair that has broken the trust in a couple’s relationship? A child that is “acting out” behaviors that cannot be addressed within the family? The lack of self-esteem brought on by the loss of a job or a broken relationship? The adjustments required due to a life-threatening illness such as cancer or heart disease? These are just a few examples of some of the key issues that families need the help of a therapist to address. Along with the verbal assessment done with the family on the first visit there is also a written assessment which can be down loaded and printed off as a PDF file. Families coming to counseling for the first time with Lifeline Counseling Center will need to fill out the new client information form. Doing so prior to your appointment will help make best use of our time together.

After the central problem is identified, there are a number of goals that may be achieved which will assist in the healing process. Of course each family or couple would have their own goals, but here is a sampling of goals that might emerge:

**Couples’ and families’ communication skills improved:** This goal includes the family learning how to do “active listening” and use problem solving skills

**Relationships repaired:** This goal includes the restoration of trust, the practice of confession and forgiveness, the assurance of the family being a “safe haven” where the family feels loved, cared for, accepted, and welcome as a place where they belong.

**Mindful understanding of family dynamics:** this goal includes equipping the couple to recognize communication that is unhealthy; where there is emotional or physical abuse taking place, and identify and avoid roadblocks to communication that can harm the relationship

**Spiritual enrichment:** included in this goal is a new understanding of God’s unconditional love, the use of mediation and prayer, learning how to implement new family traditions.

**The Passion for life is repaired:** working on a broken relationship takes energy and requires a focus of attention. When there is healing in the relationship or within the person, new energy is released for pursuing common goals and a new sense of purpose blossoms. And hope for the future is restored.

## **WHEN A CRISIS HAPPENS IN A RELATIONSHIP**

Sometimes we find ourselves feeling like the “wheels just fell off” on our ride through life. To enter into counseling when a crisis takes place is a very healthy way to care for yourself and your relationships. Very often, the burden of feeling helpless and victimized is overwhelming when a crisis strikes. This is the very reason to seek out a therapist who can help you find your way through the maze of feelings, decisions, self-doubt and helplessness that you may be experiencing.

Some of the crisis that would merit counseling:

You have discovered your spouse was having an affair

The doctor has informed you that your child has a genetic defect that could be life threatening

You have just learned that you have cancer

You have found yourself crying for months after the loss of a loved one and you can’t stop the tears.

You have just been “downsized” from your job

You have gone through a major trauma (robbery, rape or returned from a war zone, for example)

You have just moved to a new location and feel isolated and alone

You are struggling with an addiction and would like to get sober and practice sobriety

These are just a few examples of the kinds of crisis people experience and may find hope and healing through counseling. The Chinese character that stands for “crisis” combines two words – “danger” and “opportunity”. We can grow through a crisis and find new strength and vitality as we heal. A therapist can help you grow from the “danger” side of crisis to new “opportunities” and establish hope for the future.