

What to expect during your first couples therapy session

Hi everyone, Irina Baechle here- a licensed relationship therapist from IrinaBaechleCounselingLLC.com and today we are talking about what to expect during your first couples therapist session. So last week we have talked about what to expect during your first initial consultation call with the therapist, which is in essence a conversation that helps both therapist and the client to really gain understanding whether it's going to be a good fit between both of them. And we also covered what to expect during your first individual therapy session with the therapist, which is not entirely different from couples therapy but it is different because their dynamic is different now, so in couples work there are 3 people in the room, right? Or when I do virtual sessions, it is 3 people talking together and so their interpersonal and their communication dynamic is different. But it is also different because unlike the individual therapy where the client is my client, in couples therapy the relationship is my client, so this means that I am a neutral person and my job is to not take sides. I do not say who is right and who is wrong or try to fix them, but instead I advocate on behalf of the relationship. So during the first few minutes of the couples therapy we, just like in the individual session, cover the basics. So, we talk about some housekeeping stuff like your paper work and consent forms, and the cancellation policies and the confidentiality limits, things like that.

We also talk about “no secret policy” which means that I do not keep secrets when I do couples therapy. So, if you tell me something during an individual therapy session which we will talk about structure of the couples work in a little bit, if you tell me something about the relationship or about you or something you did during an individual session with me, I will or I will have you bring it up. So, unless you want this material to be discussed in a couples therapy format, I encourage you to not bring it up at all when we talk and again I do this because my job is to ensure safety between all of us and it can be productive work only when we don't have to worry about who said what and what I am supposed to say and what I am not supposed to say.

Also in terms of the structure of couples therapy it's different. For example, I am trained in EFT, right, emotional focused couples therapy and so during the first session all of us meet together, so it's a therapist and a couple meeting together and discussing what's going on, maybe talking a little bit about the cycle, talking a little bit about the needs, the goals, what are we trying to achieve there, right? And then, the second and then the third sessions are individual sessions. So, session 2 may be with partner A and then session 3 may be with partner B. However, sometimes, not always, but sometimes I request for more than 1 individual session, it happens when I am unclear about certain things or there is some kind of extensive history that needs to be explored further, so it doesn't happen very often but it does happen when we do 2 or 3 or 4 individual sessions before we all regroup together. So, like I mentioned, session 1 is together, session number 2 and 3 are separate and then the fourth session is when we come back together and then we come up with a plan, the goals and just talk about some of the things that were brought up during the individual sessions.

We will probably going to be talking a little about the attachment theory during the session and figuring out your attachment style, which basically means your coping strategies, like, for example, how do you cope when your heart is uncomfortable? How do you cope when you feel hurt? Some of us are “pursuers” so we start yelling and screaming and we pressure more and kind of become bigger in a way. And some people withdraw, we call them “withdrawers”. It's a term from literature and they shut down because they want to protect the relationship against their emotional turmoil.

So, it's hard to say which one you are exactly without reflecting upon it for some time. It also depends on different situations. So, we are talking about that and we are talking about the cycle, right. So, what is it

that you do when you feel uncomfortable? What is it that your partner does when he or she feel uncomfortable? How does it look on the outside here? And what do you feel on the inside? And then understating the infinity loop (the back and forth emotional dance) helps us understand what are some of the behaviors that are happening, what are some of the emotions that are happening and how we are impacting each other inside a relationship.

I will probably ask you questions like, “When you get scared, what do you do?”, “Who was there for you when you were younger?”, “How do you repair after an argument?”, “When you have a fight with your partner how do you talk about it? Do you just kind of brush it off?”, “Do you rather not talk because you don’t want to rock the boat?”, “How were emotions expressed in your family when you were growing up? Was it something that was talked about? Or was it a taboo?”

So we are doing this because we understand from 30 years of research that has been done on love and attachment and relationships that the conflict is just the inflammation, right? The fight, the conflict is just an inflammation and the virus is the emotional disconnection, so we know that our job is to help you guys as a couple to really hear each other and be accessible to each other’s emotional needs in order for your emotions, for your nervous systems to feel secure, to feel safe, to feel like your partner is there for you.

So, there is a model that we use which is “awesome” again based on many years of research that really works and it can take on average between 15 and 20 sessions I would say if there is no trauma. Any history of trauma, which most people have, makes the treatment process a little longer and a little more complex. And more trauma you have, more difficult things happened to you, more time it’s going to take us to heal that but once we heal that in the couples content, not in an individual content, and your partner, who you love, who your care about, can share this with you or you can share this with your partner-the more safe you will feel. You will feel different in the world and it will help strengthen your relationship and if we don’t touch this pain it blocks our connection, it does.

Okay, so I think that’s pretty much everything I wanted to cover. Next time we are going to be talking about “what to expect during your first virtual session” so stay tuned to that but for now thanks for watching and see you soon. Bye bye