

2. What are the key qualities that make an effective relationship counsellor

1. Unbiased Approach: counsellors need to remain neutral, helping couples make decisions for themselves rather than taking sides. Their role is to facilitate decision-making without imposing opinions, except in cases of danger.

2. Create a safe place: counsellors should create a calm and peaceful environment for clients to share their struggles, especially in high-stress situations, by staying composed and showing compassion.

3. Patience and Active Listening: Good couples counsellors listen attentively and patiently, providing a safe space for clients to express their emotions and experiences.

4. Effective Communication: Strong communication skills are crucial, as counsellors help clients better understand each other and improve their interpersonal communication through modelling and psychoeducation.

3. Can you describe the typical structure of a couples' counselling session? How do you create a safe and supportive environment for both partners?

It is important to establish a safe and supportive environment from the initial session. In the first session, counsellors should set the tone and help couples feel comfortable, focusing on building trust and establishing a foundation for a collaborative, supportive therapeutic relationship. From the get-go, sufficient time needs to be spent ensuring that ground rules are established. Communication rules need to be agreed upon, so that everyone is respected and can speak without interruption.

4. What techniques or strategies do you use to help couples improve communication and resolve conflicts?

Use "I" Statements: Using statements like "counsellors feel hurt when..." allows individuals to express their emotions without assigning blame. This approach encourages a more open and constructive dialogue, fostering understanding and making it easier to resolve conflicts while maintaining empathy between partners.

Active Listening: Emphasize the importance of active listening, which involves fully focusing on the partner, understanding their message, and responding thoughtfully. This improves communication by helping both partners feel heard and validated.

Managing Conflict Healthily: Couples learn to manage conflict constructively by setting aside dedicated time for discussions, avoiding stressful or tired moments for critical conversations, and aiming for resolutions that respect both partners' viewpoints.

5. How do you manage situations where one partner is more willing to engage in the counselling process than the other?

It is important that both partners are willing to work on the relationship issues. The counsellor needs to address the differing levels of engagement early on. Acknowledging the imbalance openly and creating a safe space for the less-engaged partner to express their reservations is important. This can help build trust and show that their concerns are valid and not being ignored. By gently exploring the reasons for reluctance, the counsellor can address the partner's concerns, whether it's about vulnerability, fear of blame, or scepticism about the process. Without mutual willingness and engagement, it becomes difficult to address underlying issues, rebuild trust, and foster a deeper connection.

6. What role does empathy play in relationship counselling, and how do you foster it between partners?

Empathy is vital in relationship counselling as it helps partners understand each other's emotions, needs, and perspectives, fostering connection and healing. It reduces conflict and

promotes compassionate problem-solving. Counsellors can model empathy by validating both partners' emotions, setting an example for empathetic communication. Additionally, partners can be encouraged to validate each other's feelings, even when they disagree on the facts, as this fosters understanding and emotional connection

8. In your experience, how do you balance giving advice versus guiding couples to come to their own conclusions?

counsellors have found giving advice to be ineffective in therapy work. counsellors do not give clients direct advice and will not tell them what to do with their lives. Guiding couples to come to their own conclusions is a lot more powerful, where counsellors work with clients to navigate specific complexities in their lives and help them explore what is holding them back, what is keeping them stuck and what they actually want.

9. How do you handle high-conflict couples or couples dealing with trust issues, such as infidelity?

Creating a safe and non-judgmental space is crucial for high-conflict couples. counsellors emphasize confidentiality and respect to help both partners feel secure enough to express their feelings without fear of judgment or escalation. counsellors make sure to establish and enforce ground rules such as "no name-calling" or "no shouting" or "no interrupting". One has to be very assertive when dealing with high-conflict couples who interrupt each other or interrupt the counsellor. Some counsellors separate the partners and see them for individual sessions if their behaviour becomes too unhelpful in the session.

Cognitive Behavioral Couples Therapy (CBCT) Question:

A key CBCT technique that counsellors use is improving communication skills, where therapists teach couples how to express their needs without triggering defensiveness, through psychoeducation, which then reduces negative interactions and fosters constructive conversations. Another technique counsellors frequently use is Socratic questioning, which encourages deep exploration of thoughts and feelings, helping partners better understand their own and each other's perspectives, promoting empathy and supportive interactions.

1. What is the framework (if any) that you take when applying Cognitive Behavioural Couple Therapy?

My CBCT framework is quite structured to increase the efficiency of treatment. counsellors tend to use the following when applying CBCT to Couples Therapy. CBCT comprises agenda setting, homework setting, Socratic questioning

- Agenda setting: counsellors do this at the start of every session, in which counsellors assist the couples in selecting agenda items which can lead to productive couples therapy work in that particular session.
 - 1) Discuss agenda setting at the first session: As mentioned earlier, agenda setting may be a new skill for many patients. As a result, introducing an agenda early in therapy will socialize patients to the process. Agenda setting can be introduced by saying, "Setting an agenda at the beginning of every session will help us both be on the same page when we meet. It is important to me that you feel treatment is focusing on your stated goals every session."
 - 2) Collaborate with the patient to identify agenda items: The session agenda can be set by both the provider and patient and can be initiated by the statement, "At the start of each session, we will come up with an agenda together. "What items would you like to put on the agenda for today's session?"

- 3) Prioritize items: After identifying the agenda items, patients then prioritize them with the goal of having no more than 2-3 items per session. Some providers may find it difficult to maintain an agenda initially, especially with patients who are talkative or present with tangential speech. These tendencies likely contribute to a patient's difficulties outside of session, so it's important not to reinforce the use of unstructured time. While the agenda setting process may initially take about 5-10 minutes out of your session, through repetition and socialization, patients become proficient and it requires as little as 2-3 minutes to complete.
- 4) Write agenda items down: Writing the agenda down on a white board or clip board where both the provider and patient can see it further helps to ensure it is followed.
- 5) Balance: It's important to strike a balance between attending to items on the agenda that help patients achieve goals established at the outset of treatment and dealing with important new items that surface. Additionally, providers should strike a healthy balance in facilitating agenda setting by using an empathic and supportive approach.
- 6) Revise agenda as needed: Agenda setting is viewed as an ongoing part of the session. At times, it may even need to be revised mid-session. Items that are not discussed during the session should be placed on the agenda for the next session.
- 7) Homework: Some patients report difficulties remembering what occurred in previous sessions and also have difficulty with agenda setting. For patients like this, a good homework assignment can be to have patients jot down potential agenda items and prioritize them before the next session.
- Homework setting: counsellors tend to do this at the end of every session. These are used to extend the couple's efforts beyond the confines of the treatment session and to reinforce learning of CBCT concepts. Homework setting comprises:
 - Ask client to summarize rationale in relation to therapy goals
 - Collaborate to specify how the task will be practically possible (i.e., when, where, how often, and how long it will take)
 - Consider potential difficulties
- Socratic Questioning: Using Socratic questioning, counsellors help couples develop more adaptive perspectives and build skills to cope with conflict and distress. counsellors assist couples through a process of guided discovery to determine whether there are other more balanced perspectives they could be taking. Socratic Questioning engages couples in a collaborative, discovery-oriented way of working.

2. What are some common issues that couples face and what methods do you employ to tackle them?

When couples face the problem of communication issues, counsellors utilise the principle of active listening. To apply active listening, counsellors ask couples to summarise their partner's problem before responding. When couples face difficulties managing conflict, counsellors utilise the principle of conflict resolution skills. To apply these skills, counsellors ask couples to identify their triggers, express their needs calmly and find mutually agreeable solutions. Finally, when couples feel disconnected/distant from one another, counsellors try to build emotional intimacy. To apply this principle, counsellors ask couples to engage in activities that foster empathy, trust, and understanding. This can involve practicing gratitude, sharing positive experiences, and engaging in shared activities.

3. What are some common emotions that are displayed during relationship counselling and how do you handle such emotions?

When clients feel angry, counsellors use practices that help regulate their emotions such as soothing and grounding. When they feel hurt, counsellors advise them to communicate vulnerably with each other about their emotional hurt. When they feel misunderstood, counsellors utilise Socratic questioning to discover the root of the misunderstanding. When they feel anxious, counsellors recommend diaphragmatic breathing to regulate their emotions.

4. How do you help couples arrive at their own solutions? Do you have a framework that you use?

The CBCT framework is one that uses a collaborative and exploratory process to help couples develop more adaptive perspectives and build skills to cope with difficult emotions. Counsellors guide clients to recognize their own internal resourcefulness and ability to problem-solve when appropriate.

5. Lastly, what is a technique(s) that you find yourself commonly using during couple's relationship counselling?

Counsellors find themselves using reflective listening/active listening the most as it is especially beneficial for couples who want to work on their communication skills. Counsellors role-model and demonstrate active listening skills and create a safe environment where the couple can practice and take turn being an active listener, giving the other partner an opportunity to speak freely. Active listening helps couples develop empathy and lays the foundation for a deeper emotional connection, mutual respect, and a harmonious life together.