



Creative Experiential Online Couples Therapy

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Couples Therapy in 2020

- ▶ Year of Seismic Change
- ▶ Disruptive Innovation
- ▶ Couples Therapy through Technology

Online Couples Therapy Advantages

For the therapist:

- ▶ Flexible lifestyle
- ▶ Low overheads
- ▶ Increased income
- ▶ Wider access to couples
- ▶ Facilitates specialisation

For the couple:

- ▶ Fits couple's schedules
- ▶ Better access to specialised services
- ▶ Zero commute
- ▶ Partners can be in separate locations

This sounds
great but...



How much of a barrier is the screen?



What are the online limitations?



Are these limitations real or arbitrary?



Can empathic connections form online?



Does deep, healing work take place online?

Think about
your
caseload
and ask...

Do I speak for partners rather than having them talk to each other?

Are they talking about rather than working on an issue?

Are multiple issues raised in a session?

What am I not doing online?

Why am I holding back?

Could my work be more experiential?

Do I want to work in ways that are playful, creative and experimental?

Will I hold myself, and my couples, in warm regard as we try something new?

Therapist's Stance Working Creatively Online

- ▶ Aggressively healthy and excited about life
- ▶ Maintains position of “Okayness” for Self and Client
- ▶ Is on the side of the Natural Child
- ▶ Offers non-judgemental caring
- ▶ Does not allow positive strokes to be discounted
- ▶ Uses humor but does not laugh at self-destructive behavior
- ▶ Interrupts self-harassment
- ▶ Makes playful confrontations
- ▶ Carefully tracks the process
- ▶ Says “Of course” to things that are natural and normal

The Paper Exercise: Adapted from Susan Campbell's Book, The Couples Journey

Identifies the process couples use to talk about issues

Gives insight into the couple's developmental stage

Illuminates each partner's level of differentiation

Useful as an assessment tool and an intervention

Helps each partner to form autonomous goals to develop a more differentiated process for managing conflict

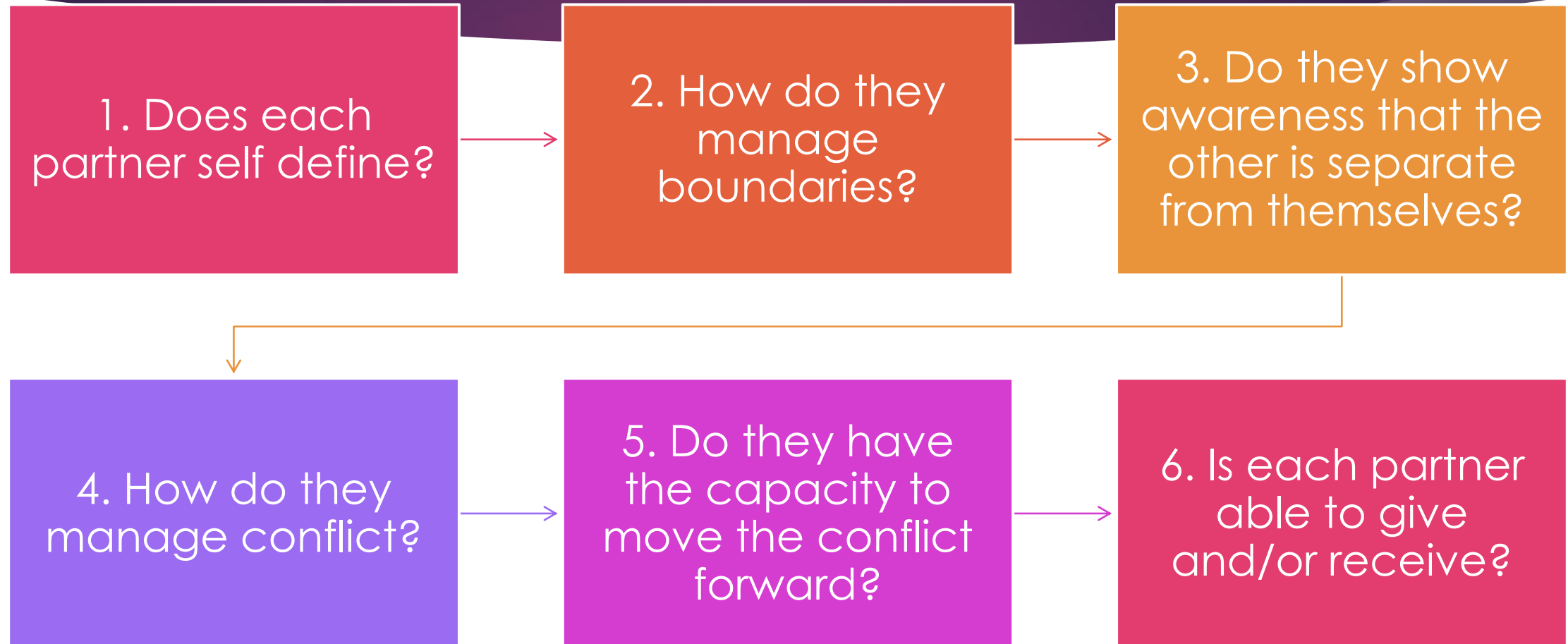
Paper Exercise Instructions

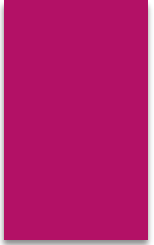
Holding a sheet of paper say to one partner, *"This piece of paper represents something important to you. I'd like you to take a minute to think about what this paper represents to you. You can pick anything that's important to you except for your kids and your marriage."*

Pause so they can process the request. When they confirm they have something repeat the question to the second partner and wait for confirmation that they too have thought of something.

Ask the couple to hold the paper. Make sure each person is holding an end of the paper and say, *"I'd like you to hold the paper between you and I'm going to give you up to five minutes to decide who gets the paper without ripping or tearing it. You can do it verbally or non-verbally. You can do it any way you like, but by the end of five minutes, I'd like you to decide who gets the paper without ripping or tearing it."*

Processing the Paper Exercise





Zoe: I guess he's giving it to me.
Arin: This is something that's important to you so you should keep it.
Zoe: It's my core principles.
Arin: I understand. I will find something else.
Zoe: Doesn't that seem like we don't care?
Arin: I wouldn't enjoy what I picked if you had to give up your core principles.
I'll create something else. *(silence)*
Zoe: This has never happened before. It's a sweet sentiment but this wouldn't happen.
Arin: What I said was real. I don't like to hear it's pretend. *(long silence)*
Nancy: Are you finished?
Arin: I think we've decided.
Zoe: I don't feel great. Ultimately I'm confused. You made the choice for me.
Arin: I didn't choose for you, *(angrily)* I made a choice for me. *(silence)*
Nancy: One minute left. *(silence)*
Nancy: Are you finished?
Arin: You're presumably accepting. *(silence)*
Nancy: How are you feeling?
Arin: Sad because I gave up something important.
Zoe: I feel conflicted. You made a choice and convinced me that I made the choice.

The Concept of Chair Dialogues

Chair work is a therapeutic method that can be used to work with internal conflict, loss, difficult relationships, complex emotions, the inner critic and trauma by enabling clients to speak from their different parts. At the centre of the practice is a belief that there is a healing and transformative power in:

1. Internal dialogues - giving voice to one's different inner parts, modes and viewpoints
2. External dialogues – enacting or re-enacting scenes from the past, present or future
3. Parent interviews – understanding the impact of a parent's pathology on the self
4. Exploring the different ego states that are involved in a particular problem

Setting Up Chair Work

Identify the client's desire for something more than they have right now

Clarify the internal split between their desire and their resistance.

Ask the client if they are willing to do an experiment with you to understand these two alter egos more.

Have them set up two chairs.

Ask their partner to listen as you will look for their feedback at the end.

If possible, have the listening partner sit where you can see them.



Intrapsychic Experiential Work on the Divided Self

Begin

Invite the client to begin with the aspirational side. Ask them to clarify their thoughts, feelings and desires from this chair.

Switch

Have the client switch to the second chair and speak from another part that feels differently - their alter ego.

Embellish

Work to embellish both parts as the client moves between chairs. Have them talk directly to the part in the other chair. At all times be clear about which part is speaking.

Collaborate

If time allows, invite the two parts to collaborate internally, to access appropriate resources that were unavailable in the past, and to design a next step experiment to get what they desire.

Creative Experiential Psychodrama



Stan Tatkin's Welcome Home Exercise for Couples

<https://youtu.be/V9FBdC2Kykg>