

TEAM-CBT

Relationship Work

Tools and Techniques specific to relationship work including Assessment of Resistance and other parts of TEAM that are a little different from mood work.

Relationship Work

What we will try to cover over the next few months.

- Overview of Relationship work
- Couples vs Individuals
- Testing – Relationship Satisfaction Scale
- Empathy
- Agenda Setting
 - Paradoxical Invitation
 - Psychoeducation & CBA of Blame
 - Moment in Time (Relationship journal – Part 1 & 2)
 - Rules vs Roles or IPDA
 - Miracle Cure Question
 - Process Resistance & Willingness Scale
- Relationship Journal – Part 3 (Empathy Errors)
- Relationship Journal – Part 4 (Cost of Poor Empathy)
- Relationship Journal – Part 5 (Revise My Communication)
- Several Other Methods
- EFT, Gottman, and Faith tools

Overview

- TEAM-CBT only
 - Individual relationship work
 - Couples work
 - Both
- TEAM +
 - EFT or EFCT - Emotionally Focused Couples Therapy
 - CBCT (CBT for Couples)
 - Other: Attachment Theory, Gottman, etc.
 - Faith Tools

When to Use it

- Varies based on training and preferences.
 - IE: I only do individual relationship work and I recommend clients do personal work first. Mandatory if depression /anxiety is high.
 - Thai-An does couples together.
 - Maor does couples adding EFT (EFCT).
- EFCT and CBCT (Cognitive Behaviour Couples Therapy) have some efficacy
<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC9645475>
- Attachment theory doesn't seem to have the same efficacy, however attachment related issues do improve with EFT.
<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC4581532/>

When to Use it

- EFCT and CBCT (Cognitive Behaviour Couples Therapy) have some efficacy, approx. 70% with over 50% long term success:
<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC9645475>
- Attachment theory doesn't seem to have the same efficacy, attachment related issues do improve with EFT.
<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC4581532/>
- Gottman Approach somewhat effective (unknown how much due to small study size and limited data).
<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC6037577/>

Conclusions

- **Cognitive Restructuring Tools in TEAM-CBT**
 - Relationship Journal part 3, 4, 5
 - Forced Empathy
 - 5 Secrets, especially Disarming Technique
 - Reattribution
- Add other cognitive restructuring tools to David's basic "relationship" tools may be helpful. Examples:
 - Positive Reframing Other Person's View
 - Negative Thoughts about the relationship / other person, use a DML and regular Methods for NT's.

Couples vs Individuals

For the purpose of this class: Most “couples” work can work with any two people. IE: romantic partners, married/unmarried, siblings, parent/child, etc.

We will focus mostly on working with individuals in our training and practice, however this work can be done with “couples” and we will address how that might look a bit different today.



Working with Individuals

This is the way David presents relationship work and is usually the easiest approach. In this approach we only work with one individual. In some cases you might have each person working with you individually, but you'll treat each one as if they were the only one doing the work.

🔵 **Pros:** It is easier to do empathy and you can focus clearly on the person in session. There is no mediation involved or redirection of conflict. Once you have full commitment, the improvements are faster, and if you need to transition to mood work or SDB work the client feels free to express what is really going on for themselves.

🔵 **Cons:** You may not see problematic dynamics. It's unfair and feels unfair to the client, especially in circumstances where you see a lot of errors in the partner. IE: there was an affair but the person who had the affair isn't doing any repair work. It's more expensive if both people want to do the work.



Working with Couples

This is the most common expectation of relationship work and what clients (and some clinicians) think will work best. Usually this is because they are convinced that it's the other person who is the "real" problem and they are coming as a couple to fix the other person. Usually the one who initiates the therapy is the one who think's it's the other person with the problem, but they will emphatically say they know it's 50/50 and are invested in working together.

🌀 **Pros:** You can more fairly address repair work if there was a trust rupture.

🌀 **Cons:** It is much harder to hold the reins and keep each person accountable to doing their own work. You must be skilled in redirection to keep the sessions from ending up as mediation sessions. You may not (likely will not) get equal buy in. Thus one will be doing more homework than the other which can cause more conflict and frustration. It can be hard to sit with open hands if one partner is doing lots of work.



Doing BOTH!

Of course, there is a way to marry the two approaches. You can do 2-4 individual sessions, making sure both individuals have signed a full disclosure agreement. Then you can move to couples work once you they each have completed a relationship journal in full. They can then work on the 5 Secrets together in session as well as other tools you think would benefit them.

🔵 **Pros:** You can establish good therapeutic regard before getting into the harder tools. It's easier to manage the beginning sessions. You get the benefit of doing the other relationship work such as teaching them live in session the 5 Secrets giving them both feedback, or other tools like EFT work. The best of both worlds so to speak. You can speed up the work because you can address issues right in the here and now rather than the client just “telling you” what happened.

🔵 **Cons:** You may not get equal buy in. One may drop out part way. It's more expensive at the beginning.

Couples – 10 Key Points #1

Establish a Collaborative Agenda:

- Clarify **both partners' goals** for therapy.
- Help them agree on a shared focus and **acknowledge their individual goals.**
- **Why it's important:**
 - It prevents the therapist from becoming the referee.
 - Ensures both partners feel heard.
- **How:**
 - Do a Miracle Cure question for each person. Is there a common goal?
 - **Example:** *"What would success look like for each of you in this therapy?"*

Couples – 10 Key Points #2

Avoid Taking Sides (Maintain a Neutral Stance)

- It is natural for couples to expect the therapist to **validate their side**.
- However, the therapist must remain **neutral and balanced**.
- **Why it's important:**
 - Taking sides erodes trust.
 - It shifts the focus from “fixing the partner” to improving the relationship.
- **How to:**
 - Do brief 5 Secrets for each person. Keep responses short. **Example:** *"I can see Marg you feel hurt and disappointed. I can also understand Jake might feel defensive and annoyed."*
 - Interrupt as needed, not allowing one partner to dominate the session.
 - Do a DML (on your own) if you feel more aligned with one person.

Couples – 10 Key Points #3

Focus on Process, Not Content

- Couples often bring **specific problems** (money, in-laws, parenting) to therapy.
- The therapist should shift the focus to **how they communicate about problems**, not the problems themselves.
- **Why it's important:**
 - Solving one problem won't prevent future conflict.
 - We want to focus on skills for **long-term change** and increased intimacy.
- **How to:**
- Let the couple know you will be teaching them the **5 Secrets of Effective Communication**. **Example:** *"We are going to focus on communicating in a way that fosters intimacy and connection. This is not just about listening or telling the other person how you feel, but it's a transformative change in how you connect with each other. Let's start with writing out a Relationship Journal. Can you give me a specific moment in time when you had a conflict?" Fill in Step 1 and 2. Best for each of them to do their own RJ.*

Couples – 10 Key Points #4

Know When to Separate or Refer (Protecting Client Well-Being)

- Some couples have issues beyond communication (abuse, addiction, infidelity).
- If there is ongoing harm, the therapist should prioritize safety and well-being, even if it means separation or referral.
- **Why it's important:**
 - Protecting the client is the first ethical responsibility.
 - Some couples may require individual therapy first.
- **Example:** *"Given what you're describing, I think individual therapy may be needed to ensure both of you feel safe and supported."*

Couples – 10 Key Points #5

Assess for Abuse or Coercive Control (Non-Negotiable)

- **Why it matters:** Domestic violence, emotional abuse, or coercive control can significantly undermine therapy outcomes.
- **Signs to watch for:**
 - One partner dominating conversations or decision-making.
 - Fearful body language or nervousness from one partner.
 - Partner minimizing abusive behavior ("*It's not that bad.*").
- **Action:** If abuse is present, prioritize safety and consider separate therapy or external support.

Couples – 10 Key Points #6

Identify Emotional Disengagement (Checking Out)

- **Why it matters:** Emotional disengagement (where one partner has mentally checked out) is a major predictor of divorce.
- **Signs to watch for:**
 - Flat affect or indifference during sessions.
 - Frequent statements like *"I don't care anymore."*
 - Lack of responsiveness when the partner shares feelings.
- **How to:** Acknowledge the disengagement, validate feelings, and explore what caused the emotional detachment.

Couples – 10 Key Points #7

Observe Patterns of Contempt or Disrespect (Gottman's #1 Predictor of Divorce)

- **Why it matters:** Contempt (belittling, sarcasm, or disdain) is a major sign of relational breakdown.
- **Signs to watch for:**
 - Eye-rolling, scoffing, or mocking during conversations.
 - Using harsh language or character attacks ("*You're so lazy.*").
 - Constant criticism disguised as "joking."
- **Action:** Point out contempt as destructive. Do a CBA of blame and then an EAR checklist.

Couples – 10 Key Points #8

Monitor for Stonewalling or Avoidance of Conflict

- **Why it matters:** Stonewalling (shutting down emotionally) often leads to long-term disconnection.
- **Signs to watch for:**
 - One partner refusing to engage or shutting down when conflict arises.
 - Long periods of silence in response to confrontation.
 - Leaving the room or disengaging during conflict.
 - Apologizing to deflect. The only time apologies are valid is when there was a wrong committed and when apologizing it should end with an invitation to discuss more.
 - IE: “I’m sorry I shouted at you yesterday. I was feeling so angry. I can imagine you felt hurt and maybe misunderstood or even annoyed. What was happening for you?”
- **Action:** Help the withdrawing partner express their internal experience. Encourage structured communication. Affirm it’s ok to have different reactions to situations and couples can address issues after the fact if they are feeling too intense in the moment. Can also make a note to address in SDB section or have client do some personal work with a DML.

Couples – 10 Key Points #9

9. Watch for Anxiety, Depression, Unresolved Grief or Trauma Influencing the Relationship

- **Why it matters:** How we think can shape relational patterns.
- **Signs to watch for:**
 - Overreactions to minor conflicts.
 - Extreme fear of abandonment or rejection.
 - Projection of past trauma onto current relationship.
- **Action:** Address it through individual work using DML and Mood tools. Focusing on SDB's may be the most helpful and direct approach.

Couples – 10 Key Points #10

Monitor for Therapeutic Alliance (Trust in the Therapist)

- **Why it matters:** If one partner distrusts the therapist, therapy will stall.
- **Signs to watch for:**
 - One partner feeling the therapist is biased.
 - One partner feeling unsafe or misunderstood.
- **Action:** Continuously check in on alliance through the ETS and a brief check in from time to time, IE: “Do you both feel heard and supported?”

15min Consultation

During the 15 min consultation (or you might be doing this as a transition from mood work with a current client).

Listen briefly (5-10 minutes)

Offer some empathy then do a modified paradoxical invitation.

Explain how you work on relationships and if you do individual work, couples work, or both.

Further Relationship Education HW - I ask clients to read the first 2 sections of the book “Feeling Good Together” before doing ANY relationship work for homework before our first session (or after intake).

15min Consultation

Example for one-on-one work: “Sounds like you are sad and frustrated by X doing Y (FE/TE). Also sounds like you want to improve your relationship which is great (SK). I can see you love X and really want to have a meaningful, loving relationship (SK). I enjoy helping clients get closer to those they love (IF/Dangle the Carrot). At the same time, I’m not sure I’d want to ask you to do this kind of work. You have every right to feel the way you do and it’s unfair but in the kind of work I do with clients, you’d have to be willing to look solely at your role in the relationship. You will have to commit to spending 20-30 min a day on homework such as reading, worksheets, and practicing communication skills we talk about in session (Gentle Ultimatum). In relationships there is a weird paradox of cause and effect. It’s never one person, yet one person can make the difference since relationships are 100% you and 100% me, not 50/50 like we’ve been led to believe. That means if you change your 100% the relationship must change, it’s impossible for it not to. This may or may not change the other person. This kind of work is unfair since we don’t ask the other person to do any work even if they are the biggest culprit in the conflict. (Psychoeducation). Is that something you are up for, totally makes sense if not. Or maybe we could look at helping you to feel better regardless of your current relationship, of course it won’t improve the relationship, but you’ll feel better. What are your thoughts on everything I’ve said so far? (IN/Sitting with Open Hands)”

15min Consultation

Example for couples' work: "Sounds like you are both feeling sad and frustrated about your relationship conflicts (TE/FE whatever emotions came up). I can see you love each other and really want to have a meaningful, loving relationship (SK). I enjoy helping clients get closer to those they love (IF/Dangle the Carrot). At the same time, I'm not sure I'd want to ask you to do this kind of work. You have every right to feel the way you do and it's unfair but in the kind of work I do with clients, you'd each have to be willing to look solely at your role in the relationship. Each of you will have to commit to spending 20-30 min a day on homework such as reading, worksheets, and practicing communication skills we talk about in session. AND you are not allowed to track the other persons effort or time spent on homework (Gentle Ultimatum). In relationships there is a weird paradox of cause and effect. It's never one person, yet one person can make the difference since relationships are 100% you and 100% me, not 50/50 like we've been led to believe. That means if you focus on changing your part, the relationship must change. Paradoxically the more we focus on fairness and getting what we want, the harder it is to have intimacy and connection. This is a lot of hard work and sometime unfair since we don't try to figure out who the biggest culprit is in the conflict. That kind of focus leads to a competition of who is right and who is doing more work and does not lead to improving the relationship. (Psychoeducation). Is that something each of you are up for, totally makes sense if not. Maybe one of you came here just to appease the other person and you really aren't up for this kind of commitment. What are your thoughts on everything I've said so far? (IN/Sitting with Open Hands)"

Demo & Practice



Relationship Work SIMPLE Outline

Flow Chart for Relationship Work using TEAM-CBT only. Can add other methods into “other methods”.

See handout for more detailed outline.

- Testing – Relationship Satisfaction Scale
- Empathy
- Paradoxical Invitation
- Psychoeducation
- Moment in Time (Relationship journal – Part 1 & 2)
- Rules vs Roles
- Miracle Cure Question
- Acid Test
- Assessment of Resistance (CBA of Blame)
- Paradoxical Inquiry
- Willingness Scale
- Process Resistance
- Willingness Scale
- Relationship Journal – Part 3 (Empathy Errors)
- Relationship Journal – Part 4 (Cost of Poor Empathy)
- Relationship Journal – Part 5 (Revise My Communication)
- Other Methods

- **T = Testing**
- E = Empathy
- A = Assessment
- M = Methods

Testing

Relationship Satisfaction Scales

Relationship Satisfaction *	Before Session						After Session							
	0—Very Dissatisfied	1—Moderately Dissatisfied	2—Somewhat Dissatisfied	3—Neutral	4—Somewhat Satisfied	5—Moderately Satisfied	6—Very Satisfied	0—Very Dissatisfied	1—Moderately Dissatisfied	2—Somewhat Dissatisfied	3—Neutral	4—Somewhat Satisfied	5—Moderately Satisfied	6—Very Satisfied
Put the name of an important relationship in your life: <input type="text"/>														
Use checks (✓) to indicate how you feel about this relationship. Please answer all 5 items.														
1. Communication and openness														
2. Resolving conflicts														
3. Degree of affection and caring														
4. Intimacy and closeness														
5. Overall satisfaction														
	Total →						<input type="text"/>	Total →						<input type="text"/>

Relationship Satisfaction Scale*

Instructions: Place a check (✓) in the box that best describes how satisfied you feel in your closest personal relationship on a scale from 0 (very dissatisfied) to 6 (very satisfied).

Please answer all 7 items.

	Dissatisfied			Satisfied		
	0—Very	1—Moderately	2—Somewhat	3—Neutral	4—Somewhat	5—Moderately
1. Communication and openness						
2. Resolving conflicts and arguments						
3. Degree of affection and caring						
4. Intimacy and closeness						
5. Satisfaction with your role in the relationship						
6. Satisfaction with the other person's role in the relationship						
7. Overall satisfaction						
Total Items 1 - 7 →						

Score	7-Item Relationship Satisfaction Test (RSAT)**
0 - 10	Extremely dissatisfied
11 - 20	Very dissatisfied
21 - 25	Moderately dissatisfied
26 - 30	Somewhat dissatisfied
31 - 35	Slightly satisfied
36 - 40	Moderately satisfied
41 - 42	Very to Extremely satisfied

** NOTE: Newer Relationship Scale is only 5 questions. Score key has changed.

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- T = Testing
- **E = Empathy**
- A = Assessment
- M = Methods

Empathy

Empathy with Couples

- If you are working with individuals, you can do empathy as you would in mood work. But with couples, there are a few nuances you may find helpful to keep in mind.
 - It's hard to do Disarming tactfully, IE: "He's being a jerk." when "he" is right there. Rather focus on TE/FE/SK/IN.
 - Do it in bite sizes, engaging each person for only short periods of time so the other does not feel ostracized.
 - You may find yourself focusing more about the two people learning to give each other A+ empathy than on your own therapeutic relationship with the couple.
 - Showing how to do a 5 Secrets response will be more valuable than just being empathic.

Build Rapport

- Use the 5 Secrets to build rapport & align with the client.
- What's My Grade or 20/20 on the ETS

Please fill this out AFTER the session. Thank you!

Evaluation of Therapy Session*

0-Not at all true	1-Somewhat true	2-Moderately true	3-Very true	4-Completely true
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Instructions. Use checks (✓) to indicate how you felt about your most recent therapy session.

Please answer all the items.

Therapeutic Empathy

1. My therapist seemed warm, supportive, and concerned.					
2. My therapist seemed trustworthy.					
3. My therapist treated me with respect.					
4. My therapist did a good job of listening.					
5. My therapist understood how I felt inside.					
Total →					

Helpfulness of the Session

6. I was able to express my feelings during the session.					
7. I talked about the problems that are bothering me.					
8. The techniques we used were helpful.					
9. The approach my therapist used made sense.					
10. I learned some new ways to deal with my problems.					
Total →					

Satisfaction with Today's Session

11. I believe the session was helpful to me.					
12. Overall, I was satisfied with today's session.					
Total →					

Your Commitment

13. I plan to do therapy homework before the next session.					
14. I intend to use what I learned in today's session.					
Total →					

Negative Feelings During the Session

15. At times, my therapist didn't seem to understand how I felt.					
16. At times, I felt uncomfortable during the session.					
17. I didn't always agree with my therapist.					
Total →					

Difficulties with the Questions

18. It was hard to answer some of these questions honestly.					
19. Sometimes my answers didn't show how I really felt inside.					
20. It would be too upsetting for me to criticize my therapist.					
Total →					

What did you like *the least* about the session?

What did you like *the best* about the session?

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Paradoxical Invitation

Relationship Work Outline

Flow Chart for Relationship Work

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- Process Resistance
- Willingness Scale
- Relationship Journal – Part 3
- Relationship Journal – Part 4
- Relationship Journal – Part 5
- Other Methods



Paradoxical invitation

- If not done already, let them know, they will have to do all the work and only look at themselves.
- Example: “Are you willing to look solely at your part because I know that’s unfair and I’m with you if you don’t want to do this kind of work. Maybe we should work on something else less difficult?” (client might ask like what)
- Couples Example: “Who wants to do this painful work first? Or maybe we should just keep chatting. I can’t imagine either one of you wants to take on all the responsibility to change and it would make sense if you want to keep holding each other accountable.”

What if....

- What if the client says, no or what is the easier work.
- Talk about mood work and how dealing with SDB's can help them to feel happy even if they don't improve their relationship.
- May talk about the 3 options for any relationship.
- Offer a Decision Making form. (Interpersonal Decision Making).

When to Use it

- Can use during Consultation, see previous examples.
- Use after empathy (or with couples after intakes).
- Use again if resistance flairs up. IE: less than 60 on the willingness scale.

Demo Vignette

Jacob wants to make amends with his brother Ralph who is angry about Jacob going to school and leaving him to take care of his aging parents. Jacob is a bit frustrated because Ralph could have left, it was his choice to stay. At the same time he states he is willing to do the work to fix the relationship.