

Goals and Circumstances of Couples Therapy

The goal in couples/marital therapy is to create a safe and workable environment for a variety of reasons. Each person has a right to communicate openly, without hostility or violence. Each person is also entitled to their perceptions of how they see the world, themselves and dynamics within the relationship.

As an individual and couples therapist, if I determine the needs, dynamics and desires of one person in the relationship needs further exploration or attention, then individual therapy with that person may be warranted. I can do this individual work, or on occasion might refer it out to another therapist. So when do I refer out?

I typically refer out individual therapy if one of the parties has significant psychological problems that create an adversarial or hostile environment. In this case, I will request a signed release of information to talk with the therapist working with the referred client.

Additionally, if I am working with a couple and also seeing them individually, secrets will also need to be addressed in the couple's work. Thus, what is shared individually, will need be brought forth by the clients into the joint sessions. These steps (explained below) need to be honored to assure that "secrets" emerging during individual therapy do not contaminate the couples work. An open agreement is essential here; a waiver of confidentiality regarding information obtained in individual sessions can be established. Please note that I will not reveal information disclosed in individual session(s) without each client's written permission. I will of course assist each client in the disclosure of any secrets brought forward in the couples sessions. In this way, the client grows from the experience.

There are also circumstances where I choose to work with clients individually who are also in relationship with one another, while maintaining impartiality. Typically, I will suggest couples work to integrate what each person has learned in individual therapy, yet I also honor the organic dynamics of life, thus have worked effectively with clients individually who are also in a relationship together.