

HANDOUTS

DAY 2

Complete Couples

Terms & Conditions

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By booking a consultation with Complete Couples, you agree to be bound by the following terms and conditions:

Booking

1-hour or 90-minute counselling sessions may be booked on an ad-hoc basis by mutual agreement. Relationship workshops and training sessions are booked by special arrangement.

Payment

Payment is kindly requested on the day of session appointments, either by cash, personal cheque or bank transfer. Partners are deemed to be jointly responsible for the payment of session fees. Complete Couples reserves the right to suspend future appointments in the event of non-payment of session fees. Prior payment in full by bank transfer is required for workshops and training sessions.

Location of Consultations

All regular consultations will be conducted at The Lovibond Centre, unless specifically arranged elsewhere at the time of booking, or in the unlikely event that it becomes necessary to relocate a consultation due to unforeseen circumstances; in which case, Complete Couples will endeavour to provide as much notice as possible, and will seek the consent of all parties before agreeing on an alternative venue.

Cancellation Policy

Clients are required to provide a minimum of 48-hours notice in the event that they are unable to attend a session they have booked, or else they remain liable for full payment of the session fee.

Complete Couples will endeavour to provide clients with at least 48-hours notice in the event that a booked session has to be rescheduled due to unforeseen circumstances.

In the event that Complete Couples is unable to deliver a service that has been booked and fully paid for in advance, our liability will be limited to a full refund of the payment received.

Conduct of Sessions

Sessions begin and end at the appointment times agreed in advance between Complete Couples and the client. It is each client's responsibility to arrive on time, and sessions will not ordinarily over-run in the event of late arrival. If Complete Couples should be unable to begin a session on time, or needs to terminate a session before the pre-arranged time, we will endeavour to make up any loss of time by mutual agreement with the client. The same principles apply to workshop sessions, for which timings will be mutually agreed in advance.

Complete Couples aims to provide a safe environment in which to explore relationships. We therefore kindly request that clients:

- i) Conduct themselves with due respect to all parties attending sessions, and in particular, avoid blaming, threatening, or otherwise abusive language or behaviour;
- ii) Refrain from using 'phones, tablets and similar devices during sessions;

Confidentiality *(please also refer to our Data Protection Privacy Notice below)*

Counselling involves the discussion of sensitive, personal information. This information, in conjunction with the identity of a client, will not be disclosed by Complete Couples to external parties, other than in the following exceptional circumstances, under which Complete Couples reserves the right, or may be bound by law, to break confidentiality:

1. Where Complete Couples has reason to believe that there is a serious risk of harm to a client or others with whom a client may come into contact. Under these circumstances, Complete Couples may need to consult a supervisor and/or contact the client's GP or other health professional. Complete Couples will always attempt to discuss this with the client beforehand, but under certain circumstances (e.g. where life is at risk) this may not be possible;
2. Where a client informs Complete Couples that they were/are involved in, or have information about acts of terrorism, either being planned or which have already taken place, Complete Couples are legally obliged to inform the police, without giving notice to the client (Terrorism Act 2000, section 38B);
3. Where the courts or the police order or require the disclosure of information (e.g. where a client has information about the whereabouts of a missing child who is in care – section 50 Children Act 1989), Complete Couples would need to consider whether breaking confidentiality is required;
4. Where Complete Couples receives a specific written request from the client to share information with a named third party (e.g. a legal representative).

In accordance with recognised working practices, Complete Couples counsellors may consult a third party counselling professional for supervision of their work. In such instances, while actual scenarios presented by clients may be shared, the identity of clients will not be disclosed.

Seeing Individual Partners & Issues of Confidentiality

Sometimes, it may be useful for the counsellor to work with either or both couple partners individually. Under these circumstances, there needs to be prior agreement or understanding as to what happens if one client reveals a secret to the counsellor, or information which they do not want their partner to know.

The default policy of Complete Couples is as follows:

If such a secret is revealed in an individual session or via other communication, the secret will be kept confidential, unless a prior policy of transparency has already been agreed by all parties;

ii) The counsellor can only break confidentiality under certain ethical circumstances (outlined above under 'Confidentiality');

iii) While confidentiality will be respected, where the counsellor believes that disclosure of the secret is in the best interests of the relationship, the therapist will strongly encourage the client to reveal the secret to their partner.

General Information on Confidentiality/Transparency

It should be noted that although Complete Couples has a default policy of confidentiality when working with individual partners of a couple, different counsellors work with the issue of confidentiality vs. transparency between partners in different ways. There are a number of pros and cons with either way of working, as set out below:

Transparency ('no secrets') Policy

Pros:

☒ The counsellor does not risk alienating either partner by holding 'secrets' (see below for the risks and difficulties of holding secrets);

☒ The counsellor is likely to feel more comfortable with both clients, as the counsellor will not be holding secrets;

☒ The counsellor is more likely to be trusted by both partners, because the counsellor will never be hiding anything;

☒ The therapist is more likely to build a strong working alliance with both partners;

Cons:

☒ Either partner may be unwilling to share certain details (such as an affair), which may render counselling less effective than it could be;

☒ If under a prior general agreement for transparency, a partner subsequently reveals something they want the counsellor to keep secret (e.g. during an individual session), the choices for the counsellor are to honour the original agreement and break confidentiality, compromise the original agreement by keeping the secret, or end couple sessions. Sometimes, the counsellor might suggest an intermediate solution; that there should be a certain maximum number of individual sessions to work on supporting the client to disclose a secret to their partner in a couple session.

Confidentiality Policy

Pros:

- ☒ Historically, client confidentiality has been one of the greatest ethical obligations owed by the counsellor; both to protect clients and to allow clients to speak freely and safely without fear of social condemnation or retribution. The duty to maintain confidentiality is set down within the code of ethics by virtually all professional therapy organisations. Without such a policy, either partner may feel unable to begin to raise fundamental issues, which, with the agreement of the client and support from the counsellor, might ultimately be successfully addressed in a subsequent couple session;
- ☒ A client may be more relaxed and forthcoming when seen individually, on the basis that what they say will be treated as confidential by the counsellor;
- ☒ The counsellor is arguably able to do better work knowing all the facts;
- ☒ The ethical principle of 'self-determination', or 'autonomy' requires that clients can make up their own minds whether or not they wish to reveal a secret to their partner. If they reveal a secret to the counsellor, it is not up to the counsellor to force a decision on the client to disclose. This could be seen as an imposition of the counsellor's personal values on the couple;
- ☒ There are potentially some secrets pertaining to a client's past (such as abuse as a child, a twenty-year old affair, or occasional illicit drug use well before meeting their partner), which may be better left undisclosed, since disclosure could be unhelpful or even detrimental to the relationship;

Cons:

- ☒ With the assurance of complete confidentiality, a client may reveal something they wish to keep from their partner (such as an affair). In this event, the counsellor must hold the secret, which could be to the benefit of one partner, and the detriment of the other. The result might be a therapeutic imbalance created by the secret being kept between the counsellor and one partner, which is potentially counter-productive to couple therapy, and compromises the working alliance. Should the unaware partner learn of this collaboration between the counsellor and the other partner, he or she is likely to lose trust in the counsellor and may terminate therapy;
- ☒ Upon hearing a secret, the counsellor may begin to lose empathy for, or feel resentment towards the secret-holder;
- ☒ The counsellor may feel guilty for deceiving the unaware partner and consciously or unconsciously collude with that partner to make amends;
- ☒ The counsellor may not be cognitively able to hold the secret, and it may be accidentally revealed.

Data Protection Privacy Notice

What personal data do we hold?

Complete Couples holds client personal data, which may include: name, email address, telephone number, age, partner's name (where appropriate), relationship status, number of children, details pertaining to relationship issues, mental health status, addictions, use of recreational drugs, domestic abuse, self-harming and suicide risk.

Where does personal data come from?

Prospective and current clients supply personal data when contacting Complete Couples by email, completing a form on our website, or completing a questionnaire.

With whom do we share personal data?

Complete Couples endeavours to ensure that personal data is stored securely and confidentially, and is used in a safe and ethical manner, in line with EU General Data Protection Regulations, May 2018. Complete Couples does not share personal data with other parties without client consent, excepting the circumstances detailed in our Confidentiality policy (outlined above). The security of personal data sent to us via third-party systems, such as email, necessarily lies outside our control, and so clients should be aware of any attendant risks to their personal data of using such systems. For the purposes of the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) 2018, the 'Data Controllers' are Deborah Winterbourne and Simon Adamson.

What do we use personal data for?

Complete Couples uses your personal data for the following:

To respond to prospective clients with information when they have expressed an interest in our services, including arranging appointment;

To request further information from prospective clients, or suggest further action;

To understand how best to support clients through counselling. For example, the information a client might provide through completing a questionnaire helps us to determine how to proceed in working with them, and this may include carrying out a risk-assessment. This practise is in accordance with professional guidelines and necessarily requires the client to disclose sensitive personal information.

Consent, data retention and disposal

By freely submitting personal data, a client is deemed to have consented to Complete Couples using personal data under the terms outlined in this Privacy Notice.

Personal data is retained by us for a maximum period of seven years, as required for the exercise or defence of legal claims, after which it is deleted, or otherwise disposed of as confidential waste.

Your rights

In accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation 2018, clients have the following rights:

To be informed about our collection and use of your personal data;

To make a verbal or written request to access your personal data held by us, and for us to supply this free of charge within 1-month;

To have inaccurate personal data held by us rectified, or completed if incomplete;

To request verbally or in writing that we erase your personal data held by us;

To request verbally or in writing to have your personal data held by us restricted or suppressed;

To transfer any personal data previously provided to us to another party;

To object to our processing of personal data held by us, and to stop its use for specific purposes, such as direct marketing;

Not to have your personal data subject to automated decision-making processes, other than those allowed under GDPR Article 22.

Compliance Issues

Please contact Complete Couples should you have any questions or concerns about the ways in which we collect or use personal data.

Complete Couples reserve the right to amend terms & conditions from time to time without prior notice.

Model Terms for Four Options

(1) Confidentiality policy

In an individual session (or where one person arrives before their partner for a couple session, or where there has been other communication by an individual partner to the therapist outside the therapy room), the information disclosed by the individual partner will be kept confidential. Therefore, if a secret is revealed by one partner to the therapist this secret will be kept confidential.

The therapist can only break this confidentiality following standard ethical norms where there's a risk of harm either to the client or to another person (*insert your standard clause here*).

Where the therapist believes that disclosure of the secret is in the best interests of the therapy, the therapist will strongly encourage that the client reveals their secret to their partner.

(2) Transparency/ 'no secrets policy'

(a) Working with the relationship only

When a couple enters into therapy, I consider that my client is one unit: 'the relationship'. This means that my allegiance is to the couple 'unit,' and not to either partner as individuals. In practice therefore, this means that I cannot begin a couple session until you're both in the room.

Equally, all communication I send will be to both of you, and if I receive a communication from just one of you, I'll reply openly to both yourself and your partner. If one of you tells me a secret in confidence, I'll choose either to break the confidentiality or to terminate therapy.

(b) Working with individuals concurrently with the couple

Sometimes during the counselling process, I may request to see either or both partners on an individual basis. If one partner discloses secret information to me during an individual session that I believe is relevant or even essential to the proper treatment of the couple, I'll not hold this secret. I therefore request that partners do not share any secrets with me that you would not wish me to share with your partner.

If a secret is revealed to me by one partner, the first step is that I'll offer this partner every opportunity to disclose the relevant information to their partner as soon as possible, and I'll provide guidance in this process. However, if the individual refuses to disclose this information within the couple's session, I may determine that it's necessary to either break confidentiality or discontinue the counselling relationship with the couple. In these cases, I'll be happy to provide referrals to other couple therapists.

(3) Professional Judgment Policy

Transparency and Confidentiality

Sometimes, it may be useful for the therapist to work with either or both couple partners individually. In these circumstances, there needs to be prior understanding as to what happens

if one client reveals a secret to the therapist. My policy is that if a secret is revealed to me by an individual partner, either as a consequence of an individual session, or via other communication, then I reserve the right to use my judgment on whether or not to maintain this individual confidence. I'll base my decision on what will derive the greatest benefit for the couple, which will include the following considerations: (a) I'll consider the relevance and importance of the secret for the unaware partner and (b) I'll consider with sensitivity the planning as to the timing, circumstances, and consequences of disclosure for both partners in an effort to minimise possibly destructive outcomes.

Therefore, clients need to be aware that if they disclose confidential information to me in an individual session, then this information may be revealed to their partner.

(4) Client Choice

Transparency and Confidentiality

Sometimes, it may be useful for the therapist to work with either or both couple partners individually. In these circumstances, there needs to be prior understanding as to what happens if one client reveals a secret to the therapist, or something which they don't want their partner to know.

My policy is that I'll ask my clients in the first session whether they prefer a policy of (a) confidentiality, (b) transparency, or (c) professional judgement to cover what will happen where a secret is revealed to me by an individual partner.

To enable my clients to make this decision, I will, in advance of the first session, send the clients a summary of the pros and cons of working with any of these three options, and ask the client to make a decision as soon as possible.

Supplementary Points

1. Consider whether you require written consent with regard to your chosen policy:

'I require both partners to sign a written agreement to the stated policy' (transparency, confidentiality, professional judgement or client choice).

2. Ongoing Affairs

If you have a confidentiality policy, you'll need to consider what your policy is with regard to 'ongoing affairs'. For example: *'Please note that if there is an ongoing affair with regard to either or both partners, then couple therapy will not be appropriate and the therapist will seek to terminate the arrangement.'*

VISUALISATION

Introduction:

This visualisation is an exercise that you can do with couple clients that will help them uncover their unconscious relationship attraction patterns.

Some people may find this exercise distressing as it will remind them of childhood. If this is the case, please take steps to protect yourself by either just listening without partaking, distracting yourself (e.g., reading) or by leaving the venue until the end of the exercise.

Shortly I'll ask you to visualise a scene from your childhood.

(Before starting, check 'caretakers' with clients – many people had a mother and father as primary caretakers. However, some may have had two mothers, or two fathers, or two relatives or other people who were primary caretakers – discuss and decide on caretakers in advance.)

Close your eyes if it's easier, but you don't have to. This exercise is about 10 mins long.

Visualisation

I would like you to close your eyes. Begin to relax and go into yourself. Just focus on your breathing. Let all the cares and troubles of the day fall away.

Relax your face, your shoulders, your stomach and feel the tension drain through your legs and out on to the floor.

Keep breathing slowly and feel your body totally relaxed. You are in a totally safe place.

I would like you to imagine yourself in a childhood home. You are a young child probably between 3-10 years old. Take a look around your house and become familiarised with the surroundings of your old home once again. Imagine the layout and the rooms/smell/energy.

I want you to begin to become aware of your first main caretaker as they were when you were a child. Be aware of their feelings and energy. Were they angry/joyful/depressed/guilty/happy/absent? Choose your own words. Remember one positive and one negative.

Now I would like you, as a young child, to imagine sitting down with this caretaker face to face – I would like you to imagine saying to her: 'The thing you

do that hurts/upsets/frustrates me the most is...' (and tell her what she does that hurts you the most/wounds you the most).

Imagine saying to them 'What I wanted the most from you and never got was...'
Tell her what you needed. ...

Remember your frustrations with her. Remember what you did when you were frustrated; what was your coping strategy: did you go quiet; shout, talk with friends ...?

Now try to remember one positive event with this caretaker from when you were a child.

How are you feeling about this moment as a child?

And now I would like you to let this caretaker fade away. And then bring into mind your second caretaker (father).

I want you to begin to become aware of your second main caretaker as they were when you were a child. Be aware of their feelings and energy. Were they angry/joyful/depressed/guilty/happy/absent? Choose your own words. Remember one positive and one negative.

Now I would like you, as a young child, to imagine sitting down with this caretaker face to face – I would like you to imagine saying to him: 'The thing you do that hurts/upsets/frustrates me the most is...' (and tell him what he does that hurts you the most/wounds you the most).

Imagine saying to them, 'What I wanted the most from you and never got was...'
tell him what you needed. ...

Remember your frustrations with him. Remember what you did when you were frustrated; what was your coping strategy: did you go quiet; shout, talk with friends...?

Now try to remember one positive event with this caretaker from when you were a child.

How are you feeling about this moment as a child?

Now let the place of your childhood fade..... and slowly come back to the room. When you are ready, you can open your eyes.

My Unconscious Relationship Attraction Pattern Part 1

- The combined traits of my parent/caretaker that I experienced as negative were:

.....
(From the above, select one or two negative traits that you found most difficult and write them in section A on the 'Part 2' sheet)

- The combined traits of my parent/caretaker that I experienced as positive were:

.....
(From above, select one or two positive traits that you liked most and write them in section B on the 'Part 2' sheet)

- What I wanted and needed most as a child was:

.....
(Copy the above into section C on the 'Part 2' sheet)

- One or two feelings I associate with my positive memories from childhood are:

- 1)
- 2)

(Copy the above into section D on the 'Part 2' sheet)

- When I was frustrated as a child, my usual behavioural response was to:

.....
(Copy the above into section E on the 'Part 2' sheet)

My Unconscious Relationship Attraction Pattern Part 2

I am trying to get a person who is (A):

To always be (B):

So that I can get (C):

And feel (D):

I stop myself from getting this sometimes by (E):

Adapted from Hendrix, H, (2005) Getting the Love you Want. London: Pocket Books

Adult Attachment Styles

Adults have four attachment styles: secure, anxious–preoccupied, dismissive–avoidant, and fearful–avoidant.ⁱⁱⁱ A fifth was added later to this list: disorganised attachment.

The descriptions of adult attachment styles offered below are based on the relationship questionnaire devised by Bartholomew and Horowitz ¹ and on a review of studies by Pietromonaco and Barrett.²

1. Secure

Securely attached people tend to agree with the following statements:

'I find it relatively easy to get close to others and am comfortable depending on them and having them depend on me. I don't often worry about being abandoned or about someone getting too close to me.'

This style of attachment usually arises from someone with a history of warm and responsive interactions with the early attachment figure. People with secure attachment tend to have positive views of themselves and their attachment figure. They also tend to have positive views of their relationships. They tend to be more satisfied in their relationships than people with other attachment styles. They feel comfortable with both intimacy and independence. Their early attachment figure was emotionally available and responsive as well as able to regulate their emotions.

2. Anxious-preoccupied

People with anxious-preoccupied styles tend to agree with the following statement:

'I find that others are reluctant to get as close as I would like. I often worry that my partner doesn't really love me or won't want to stay with me. I want to merge completely with another person, and this desire sometimes scares people away.'

People with this attachment style are emotionally expressive and seek a high degree of intimacy and responsiveness from their attachment figure. They have less positive views about themselves; they may feel anxiousness that only recedes when in contact with the attachment figure. They often doubt their self-worth and blame themselves. They struggle with emotional regulation and can be impulsive in their relationships.

¹ Bartholomew K, Horowitz LM (August 1991). "[Attachment styles among young adults: a test of a four-category model](#)". *J Pers Soc Psychol.* **61** (2): 226–44.

² Pietromonaco PR, Barrett LF (December 1997). "[Working models of attachment and daily social interactions](#)". *J Pers Soc Psychol.* **73** (6): 1409–23.

3. Dismissive-avoidant

People with this style tend to agree with the following statement:

'I am comfortable without close emotional relationships. It's very important to me to feel independent and self-sufficient. I prefer not to depend on others or have others depend on me.'

People with avoidant attachment style desire a high level of independence. They view themselves as self-sufficient and invulnerable to feelings associated with being closely attached to others. They often deny needing close relationships and may even regard them as unimportant. They view the attachment figure less positively than they view themselves. People with dismissive-avoidant styles hide their feelings and deal with rejection by distancing themselves from their attachments.

4. Fearful-avoidant

People with losses or other trauma, such as sexual abuse in childhood may often develop this type of attachment and tend to agree with the following statement:

'I am somewhat uncomfortable getting close to others. I want emotionally close relationships, but I find it difficult to trust others completely or to depend upon them. I sometimes worry that I will be hurt if I allow myself to become too close to others.'

People with this style have mixed feelings about relationship. They do desire intimacy but are uncomfortable with emotional closeness. They often have negative views about themselves and their attachments, viewing themselves as unworthy of response from their attachment figure and at the same time they don't trust the intentions of the attachment figure. They seek less intimacy and often suppress and deny their feelings and find it difficult to express affection.

5. Disorganised

Disorganised adults had parents who frightened them and they have often experienced chronic early maltreatment, abuse and neglect from their attachment figure. In their adult relationships, there will be much volatility. They do not give love and affection easily, have explosive rages and are unresponsive to their partner's needs. They have a great need for safe and secure relationships yet lack the trust in their partners to help create it. Many people with personality disorders such as BPD have disorganised attachment style. During discussions of loss or attachment they may show a lapse in reasoning or discourse.

Note: The secure attachment style in adults corresponds to the secure attachment style in children. The anxious-preoccupied attachment style in adults corresponds to the anxious-ambivalent attachment style in children. However, the dismissive-avoidant attachment style and the fearful-avoidant attachment style, which are distinct in adults, correspond to a single avoidant attachment style in children.

Pursuer and Withdrawer Dynamic

Dialogue example:

P: Darling, can we talk about our relationship for a minute?

W: Oh, that doesn't sound good.

P: I need to talk to you. I feel we aren't very close right now.

W: Do we have to talk about this now?

P: I don't know of a better time. It's quiet now and the kids are asleep.

W: Well I'm tired. Can't we just relax? I feel like this has come from nowhere.

P: I think it's important and I need to talk about it. I don't think it has to take that long. I just feel kind of distant from you. I mean emotionally distant.

W: What do you mean? We're together most of the time.

P: We're around each other a lot, yes. But we don't talk about how we feel about each other. You never tell me how you feel about me. Do you love me?

W: Of course I love you. How many times have I told you.

P: It doesn't feel like it (gets teary; looks down).

W: Well maybe you have a problem then. I can't help it if you don't feel loved (getting stern).

P: So it's nothing to do with the fact that you can't express your emotions? That you're an emotional cripple? You've never felt a real emotion in your life (getting critical).

W: I can't talk to you when you get like this; you're too emotional and irrational.

P: Right; so you've put up your wall again.

W: No, nothing's wrong. I really don't know what I'm supposed to say. You're too aggressive.

Questions to consider:

Do you recognise this type of dynamic?

What are the feelings and needs of the pursuer?

What are the feelings and needs of the withdrawer?

The Pursuer/Withdrawer Dynamic Explanation

We all require physical and emotional contact with other people, and for younger children it's a biological imperative.

In adulthood, individuals differ greatly from one another when it comes to the amount of emotional intimacy they desire. Consequently, in couple relationship, a certain dynamic will exist between you and your partner, depending on your level of need relative to that of your partner.

You may find yourself clearly wanting more connection with your partner than they seem to desire (and pursue them for this in some way), or else you could be very much feeling as though you want more space from your partner (the withdrawer/alooof position).

As with other psychological characteristics, individuals tend to occupy a particular position on a continuum between two opposing poles, although this position is likely to vary depending on circumstances. For example, even someone who's relatively aloof might feel lonely after a lengthy period away from their partner, while another person who generally craves contact could feel overwhelmed soon after their partner retires from work.

If you've experienced being in the position of the Pursuer at some times and the Withdrawer at others (either in relationship with different partners, or with the same partner over a period of time), it's likely that you're somewhere around the middle of the Pursuer/Withdrawer continuum.

If you consistently find yourself in one position, there are likely to be factors in your childhood development that have led to your having a predisposition towards one end of the continuum.

The Dynamic

Each partner attempts to establish a level of contact that feels right for them; the Pursuer wants more emotional intimacy, while the Withdrawer wants more autonomy. Feeling anxious, a Pursuer 'moves toward' their partner in an attempt to soothe themselves. The Pursuer's anxiety is projected both through their body language and particularly their tone of voice.

The Withdrawer experiences this as overwhelming. Starting to panic, they 'pull away'. The Pursuer sees their partner withdraw, and will likely redouble their efforts to connect, or may lash out angrily from a place of hurt, fear and frustration. The Withdrawer, feeling anxious and sensing criticism, 'runs faster' from the Pursuer, who's now 'chasing' them. The dynamic could equally be seen to begin by the Withdrawer taking space from their partner in order to relieve their own anxiety.

The outcome of the partners' behaviours is that each ensures that the other cannot satisfy their need, which often leads to self-perpetuation and escalation of the dynamic.

A Pursuer's View: Whenever their partner is non-communicative, appears to be withdrawing, shutting down, avoiding them, or is away a little longer than expected, the Pursuer becomes anxious.

The worst trigger for the Pursuer is when their partner says 'I'm off' / 'I can't take this any longer', or perhaps labels them as 'hysterical'/'mad'. Such triggers will often cause a Pursuer to escalate their pursuing behaviour. Unfortunately, this usually makes matters worse. At its worst, this behaviour can comprise control, interrogation, possessiveness and stalking. Behind everything is the fear of abandonment and the need for safety. Panic lies just below the surface. They visualise the worst-case scenario; there's something wrong with them, their partner doesn't care, possible affairs, divorce, death etc.

The Pursuer may have difficulty in making contact with their own need for autonomy, because their need for intimacy isn't met by their partner.

A Withdrawer's View: When this person senses invasiveness, criticism or unpleasant pushing from their partner, they'll become overwhelmed, silent, withdrawn and perhaps feel numbed out.

The worst trigger for the Withdrawer is when their partner appears to be criticising, interrogating, controlling or smothering them. Without permission to take space, the Withdrawer shuts down. At its worst, this behaviour can comprise neglectfulness, emotional coldness, stonewalling and elusiveness. Behind everything is the fear of engulfment; emotionally and perhaps physically, and the need for safety.

Withdrawers tend to have little tolerance of conflict and may even see contact as conflictual in itself.

Hearing their partner say, 'We need to talk', can be sufficient to trigger panic, and they might feel ashamed that they're failing their partner. Ironically, when the Withdrawer feels like a failure, they fear that their partner will ultimately leave them.

The Withdrawer may have difficulty in making contact with their own need for intimacy, because attempts to meet their need for autonomy are countered by their partner.

Common Fears of the Pursuer

1. When we're emotionally disconnecting I'm full of anxiety and panic;
2. After we've emotionally disconnected, I'm afraid that my partner's withdrawal is a sign that they want to end the relationship;
3. I realise that I love my partner; I have fears of losing them, and them no longer loving me;
4. As I experience this longer, I feel terribly sad. It leaves me very lonely. It hurts so much.

Common Fears of the Withdrawer

1. I'm afraid that if my partner realises what a failure I am, they'll get fed up and leave me;
2. I'm afraid that I have so disappointed my partner that they'll leave me;
3. I'm afraid that my partner will see me as fundamentally lacking and they'll find someone else;
4. I can't tell my partner about this fear because they might agree that the fears are real and

leave me.

Needs of the Pursuer

1. Reassurance that their partner loves them and won't leave them (through actions as well as words);
2. Reminders of what their partner loves about them;
3. For their partner to demonstrate curiosity about them;
4. For their partner initiate physical contact and discussions;
5. For their partner to openly communicate their thoughts and feelings;
6. Time to be together without distractions, and knowing when their partner will return when taking space.

Needs of the Withdrawer

1. Reassurance that their partner loves them and won't leave them;
2. Space and time alone;
3. Understanding that their partner's anxiety for connection can be overwhelming and received as anger and criticism;
4. Appreciation for their contributions to the relationship/family/home etc.;
5. Patience and gentle encouragement while they learn to express themselves without withdrawing;
6. Reassurance that they're good partners/parents and not failing.

Tips for the Pursuer

Your behaviour is driven by your heightened need to know that your partner is really there for you.

You might also look to your partner for personal validation in all kinds of ways. Your primary challenge is to develop more of an ability to both self-soothe and self-validate, which in turn can help you to become less dependent on your partner and soften your pursuing behaviours. Be wary of unhealthy self-soothing strategies, such as over-eating, drinking or smoking etc.

Try to make space for plenty of relaxation, personal interests, friends, exercise and anything else that helps you to feel good about yourself and connected with others, such as spending time with children or pets. Make the most of your alone time and try to remember what you enjoyed as a single person.

Openly explain to your partner what you're doing, and try to enthusiastically support their need for space and personal interests. The more you do this, the more relaxed they'll feel around you, which will reduce their need to withdraw, and increase their capacity for connection. Try to be gently curious about their needs.

Tips for the Withdrawer

Your behaviour is driven by feelings of overwhelm at what you experience as your partner's emotional neediness/hysteria, and often, what you perceive as their anger and criticism. Your primary challenge is to realise that what you might initially read from your partner's body language/tone of voice is more likely to be anxiety than anger or criticism. However, shutting

down or pulling away is likely to invite both these things. Recognising your partner's vulnerability can help you to re-frame your experience of them, and develop more resilience.

Learn how to gently and firmly ask for space when necessary, and to anticipate your need for quiet time so as to give your partner advance notice (e.g., request a Time Out). When taking space, it's important to be clear about when you'll be returning/re-engaging, so as to reassure your partner, who will find this time difficult. Consider occasionally communicating with your partner while away, such as sending a reassuring text message.

Learn the language of feelings, and start to express when and how you feel overwhelmed. When you're feeling loving towards your partner, let them know that too! Try to be the first to initiate contact with your partner when you can, and try to be curious about their needs.

What determines our predisposition to intimacy/autonomy?

The Pursuer/Withdrawer dynamic is extremely common, and is stereotypical of heterosexual relationships, where the woman is the Pursuer and the man the Withdrawer. While some believe that these gender-specific predispositions are hard-wired, they are certainly supported through socialisation, e.g., boys are taught that it's a sign of weakness (or even madness) to show vulnerability, while girls are expected to openly express it. Men and women who conform to these norms then act as role-models to their children, thus further perpetuating the expected behaviours.

However, the Pursuer/Withdrawer roles are sometimes reversed, and are also evident in gay/lesbian relationships. It's not clear why this is, although children growing up often rebel against parental examples and expectations, rather than conforming with them. An individual's predisposition towards either intimacy or autonomy, as well as their tendency towards emotional expression, could also be influenced by experiencing parents who were anxious, disorganised, neglectful, intrusive or abusive. Such experiences could have resulted in the infant either becoming expressive and clingy, or else quiet and avoidant in their quest to feel safe.

It seems that Pursuers and Withdrawers are attracted to one another unconsciously; perhaps due to the familiarity of the dynamic and the pre-existence of a learnt strategy with which to cope with the unease. Some would say they have something to learn from one another, and that the path to resolving deeper issues is through their relationship.

Taking a wider view, there's no reason at all why any two people in a couple relationship should be expected to share a similar degree of need for emotional intimacy with one another. Their respective levels of need will differ on many other levels; sex, adventure, work, play etc. It's the perception of difference itself between partners that can fuel tension and conflict, particularly over matters in which there's a sense of dependency on co-operation, and a great difficulty in understanding one another's perspective. So, the Pursuer/Withdrawer dynamic is one of many common sources of major conflict in relationship.

Triggers

1. When I get triggered, this is how I automatically feel and think to protect myself:

I feel:

Angry, annoyed, frustrated, irritated

I rationalise to myself:

Circle all that apply:

*I don't need you anyway. I've got to stop you. I don't care. I've got to get away.
How dare you! I give up... (other)*

2. These are the feelings underneath that I do not feel safe to tell you:

I feel:

Circle all that apply:

*Scared; anxious; frightened; sad; alone; abandoned; despairing; hopeless;
hurt; not heard; not valued; not important*

When I get triggered, these are my worst fears about:

Me:

You:

Us:

3. This is what I do to protect myself:

Circle all that apply:

Blame

Demand

Lecture

Criticise

Put you down

Defend myself

Scream

Cry

Become stern

Zone out with TV

Use alcohol, marijuana or other drug

Use computer; porn; gambling; exercise

Work more;

Affair;

Walk away;

Other...(write down anything else that you do)

I do this because I can't and I do not know how to tell you gently about my needs, feelings and fears at that moment. I am afraid I will not be understood.

Therapist Reference Sheet for Dance of Disconnection

1. Hear the story from each side. Mirror back the story for each partner taking the blame and criticism out of their words;

2. Start with one partner and explain you are speaking with them one at a time;

3. Isolate and Identify the trigger moment for that partner when the dance of disconnection starts (e.g., when a certain topic of conversation comes up or when they hear a certain tone etc.);

4. Identify the emotion felt in response to the trigger by that partner;

- When each partner identifies an emotion, reflect this back to them, and try to access the primary vulnerable emotion under anger (fear, hurt, sadness, loneliness);
- When you have accessed the primary emotion, stay present to that emotion by trying any of the following interventions:
 - *'What's it like for you to feel...'*;
 - *'I imagine it must be really difficult to feel...'*
 - *'It makes sense that you might feel...'*

5. Elicit from that partner their coping mechanism to cope with the difficult feelings:

'What do you do when you begin to feel...';

6. If you have time, repeat steps 3-5 with the other partner;

7. Try to summarise the dance of disconnection for both partners: (trigger, emotion, coping mechanism).

Case Studies: Dance of Disconnection

Based on real life scenarios! Work in trios (counsellor & couple) and rotate.

The following conflictual couple scenario depicts a pattern of disconnection. Using the Therapist's reference sheet for Dance of Disconnection as a guide, the counsellor's aim is to outline the 'Dance of Disconnection' in each case.

1. Paul and Samantha are in their early thirties and have been dating for two years. Samantha is eager to start cohabiting with Paul.

Paul is not sure that their relationship is strong enough for this commitment, so he wants to wait a bit. In particular, he worries that they are fighting too much, and he believes that good relationships should be peaceful.

Samantha does not know where she stands, & she is very frustrated with Paul. She tells him with a sharp tone that she can't wait forever & needs him to commit. When Paul hears that angry tone, he feels criticised, withdraws and shuts down. He does not want to escalate the fight. Samantha gets even more exasperated, and continues to ask questions.

2. Sanjay and Krishna are married with two children. Krishna wants a much deeper intimacy with Sanjay. She would like them to talk more about feelings and their relationship. When she repeatedly asks him about this, he switches on the TV or leaves the room. Krishna is left feeling hurt and angry. She escalates her questions to try to get an answer.

Sanjay is happy with his role as provider for the family. He loves Krishna, but would rather not talk about feelings. He feels frustrated and bewildered – he wants her to stop asking him to do this.

3. Justin and Brian have been in a civil partnership for two years. They are fighting over their sex life. Justin would like sex every day; sex enables him to feel very connected to Brian. Brian feels a 'needy energy' coming towards him and it turns him off. He shuts down and goes to another room or leaves the house. He wants Justin to get a handle on his neediness, otherwise their partnership will not survive.

Couple Counselling for LGBTQIA

Questions for consideration:

1. How comfortable are you with showing affection to each other in public, such as holding hands, kissing, hugging, or acknowledging publicly you're a LGBT couple?
2. Do you have preferred sexual roles or activities? Are you happy with how this works or is it an issue in your relationship? Would you like to discuss that here? (for gay men if appropriate: who's top, who's bottom, or are you versatile? And what role does this play in your relationship?)
3. Do you have a monogamous, open, or polyamorous relationship? If open or polyamorous, what agreements, if any, have you made around negotiating sex with others? How well do these agreements work for each of you?
4. Are you both out to friends and family? If not, who is not out and how is it impacting on your relationship and your personal happiness? If you are out, what was the reaction of family and friends? What impact has coming out had on your life?
5. Do you have a joint will or estate planning, or separate wills? Have you discussed what will happen when one of you dies before the other, or if one of you becomes critically ill? Do you have financial and/or health powers of attorney? Do you have joint or sole bank accounts or credit cards?