

**INFORMATION FOR CLIENTS
RE: MARRIAGE COUNSELLING**

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The following excerpt is taken from James McCary's (1975) book, *Freedom and Growth in Marriage*, published by Hamilton Publishing Company (a division of John Wiley & Sons), Santa Barbara, CA.

"How'd we get into this trap?"

Sheila and Joe Wescott have been married for five years, and they have two children. When they married, Joe was 19 and Sheila was barely 18, and they would sit for hours planning their dream home and the trips they would take to Europe and the Orient. Their first child was born just eleven months after their marriage and was a colicky, sickly baby who needed continual care from Sheila and a great deal of medical attention. As the doctor bills mounted, Joe dropped his night classes at the university, and also dropped his dreams of completing college by taking two evening courses a semester. He took a second job in order to pay all the bills, and he and Sheila quit making plans for trips abroad, and they were too tired to look at magazine pictures of beautiful homes. As the baby grew older, both Sheila and Joe became more responsible, mature people, and they carefully weighed the merits of spending money on a movie or of applying that money to debts they owed. Joe became especially sensitive about the fact that his income was not enough to cover all their expenses every month, and Sheila learned to avoid the subject of money in their conversations.

By their third anniversary, both Sheila and Joe were unhappy in their marriage, but each believed that the fault lay in the fact that they had so many financial worries. Sheila's mother agreed to take care of the baby while Sheila worked, so she took a secretarial job. Her added income helped, but there were so many new expenses connected with Sheila's job -- bus fare, extra clothing, etc. -- that there was only a small difference in their total income. In time, Sheila began to be aware that she was attractive to some of the men in her office, and she felt vaguely uncomfortable when flirtatious remarks were made to her. There were some single girls in the office, and Sheila found herself listening with wistful envy when they talked during coffee breaks about their dates. At home, Sheila felt that her baby was forgetting her, because he was asleep when she came home in the evening, and her mornings were so hectic with preparing breakfast and getting dressed for work that she had no time to play with him. In the evening, she and Joe watched television and went to bed, frequently with only a perfunctory goodnight kiss. Their sex life was dull and monotonous, with no spontaneity or fun involved, and Sheila frequently cried quietly after Joe was asleep.

Sheila pretended to be dismayed when she became pregnant again, but she was secretly pleased because she felt that another baby would draw her and Joe closer together. She also was relieved not to have to continue working, because she was finding it increasingly difficult to avoid the temptation of responding to the men in the office who found her sexually attractive. She sternly told herself that she was a

married woman and a mother, and that dating and good times were behind her. The birth of the second baby failed to bring the feeling of closeness and sharing that Sheila had hoped for in their marriage. Instead, Joe felt firmly trapped in the life of a labourer without hope of ever getting a college education, and he felt guilty because he had secretly hoped that Sheila would continue working so that he could eventually go back to school. He had never mentioned it to her, because he felt it was a selfish wish, and he was ashamed of his resentment toward the new baby and toward Sheila for killing his dream, but his resentment was there nonetheless.

Sheila and Joe began to prick each other with small jabs of sarcasm and criticism. On the surface, they were polite and considerate, but their hostilities simmered beneath the surface. Their sex life deteriorated farther, and Joe began to treat Sheila with a kind of cold indifference during sexual intercourse. Sheila responded with a lack of responsiveness, and for a time suffered from painful vaginismus and a complete lack of vaginal lubrication. She was unable to sleep, and often got up in the night and cried alone in the living room, and Joe established the habit of stopping at a tavern for several beers before coming home in the evening. Their older child added to the unhappy atmosphere in the home by constant whining and anxious clinging to Sheila, as he sensed his parents' irritation and unhappiness, and the baby continually fretted and cried.

One night while watching TV, Sheila and Joe saw a program about a family service agency in their city. The program featured a report on a young couple who had come to the agency for marriage counselling. As they watched the program, both Sheila and Joe realized that their own marriage was in deep trouble, and for the first time in years, they had an honest discussion of their feelings of unhappiness and despair. Both agreed to go to the agency and try to revive their dying marriage.

From that point on, the story of Sheila and Joe's marriage may take many different turns, depending on their maturity and self-understanding, their commitment to the marriage, their ability and willingness to put forth effort for the marriage, and the skill and experience of the person who counsels them about their marriage. If their individual commitment is great, if they are both eager to undertake any necessary changes within themselves for the sake of their marriage, if they are both flexible and emotionally mature enough to accept counselling without becoming defensive and resentful, and if their counsellor is attuned to their problems so that he or she can offer sound and insightful guidance, the chances are excellent that their marriage will stabilize and remain successful through the coming years.

On the other hand, if each is determined to make the other the "problem," or if one or both is unwilling or unable to make any significant changes in the self or to gain any insights into his or her own behaviour, or if they are unlucky enough to find a marriage counsellor who treats all marital problems in exactly the same manner, without regard to individual personalities and circumstances, the chances are excellent that the marriage will founder more and more and eventually fall apart.

There is also a third possibility: Both Sheila and Joe may be willing and able to make changes within themselves; they may be emotionally mature and insightful; and their marriage counsellor may be flexible, experienced, and emotionally stable, with a warm rapport with both. And Sheila may decide, after intense, candid soul-searching, that she would rather be single and alone with her children than married and living with Joe. And Joe may decide that marriage before college was a

mistake that he will always regret, and that he would rather try to find a way to finish college than to have the responsibility of marriage. If this is the case, marriage counselling has not failed, and neither have Sheila and Joe. Instead, counselling will have enabled them to see that they have been the victims of a cultural system that encourages people to keep themselves in perpetual hock to their dreams of possession. Does a man want to be considered successful and achieving? Then he should buy a new car (and make payments to the bank for it for the next three years, when it is time to trade it in and buy another one). Does a couple want to be a part of the "in" suburban group? Then they should buy a house with simulated Georgian columns across the front and furnish it with Early American furniture and braided rugs, bought at their friendly furniture store at what in actuality may be an interest of 18 percent or more per annum, although through gimmicks and clever advertisement it may appear to be a much lower rate. Or should their house have arches instead of columns, they may furnish it with Mediterranean-style furniture bought at the same store at the same interest rate. Intellectual conversation is held vicariously via David Frost matching wits with Dick Cavett on the Early American or Mediterranean-style TV set (colour, of course). In such a system, a vulnerable, naive, inexperienced young couple like Sheila and Joe are almost bound to have marital difficulties. Disturbed when their romantic dreams of a continual honeymoon are not realized, their frustrations increase when they feel their slice of the good life is not as great as that of others, they suffer further disillusionment when their children prove to be smelly, messy little beings who throw up on the not-yet-paid-for couch. Having realized the basis of their own discontent, they will still be saddled with the responsibility of their children, and the manner in which they meet their obligations to those children will have great bearing on the course their children's lives take.

Whatever the outcome, a large amount of the credit or blame must go to the marriage counsellor. There are marriages that endure without satisfaction to either party, exacting a heavy toll in anxiety and confusion for the marital partners and their children, because a marriage counsellor influences them to keep the marriage together at all costs. And there are marriages that split without the partners having the opportunity to examine the marriage or their own needs, because a marriage counsellor has played God with their lives and told them that their marriage was hopeless.

CHOOSING A MARRIAGE COUNSELLOR

People choosing a marriage counsellor frequently do so without any knowledge of licensing laws in their state or of the criteria for a qualified marriage counsellor. They assume that the title of "Marriage Counsellor" implies specialized training and that anyone bearing that title has been scrutinized by some qualifying body and found competent. The sad fact is that there are many more incompetent people calling themselves marriage counsellors than there are qualified marriage counsellors.... In many states [and in Ontario], almost anyone can call himself a marriage counsellor, and ministers, educators, social workers, physicians, psychiatrists, and psychologists who have no specialized training in marriage counselling may do considerable harm, however unwittingly, by counselling marriages in trouble and applying their own biases and personal beliefs to someone else's marriage.

In addition to marriage counsellors in private practice, there are counsellors working for groups such as the Jewish Community Services, the Catholic Cana Conference of Charities, or Protestant counterparts. Various community services also provide marriage counselling, such as those sponsored by local United Fund agencies. In some cases, these religious and public agencies provide adequate counselling, but in other cases there are too many clients for the available counsellors to

provide adequate counselling for all.

A marriage counsellor may be a happily married middle-aged psychologist with an accepting, approving orientation toward life and marriage and people, or a dour, middle-aged man or woman whose own marriage is empty and who approaches a marital problem as if a marriage without problems is simply the lesser of two evils. Sometimes marriage counsellors are very directive in their approach, to the point of becoming impatient and irritated if their clients fail to immediately follow their suggestions, and sometimes they are so timidly nondirective that the clients may feel that they are simply providing their counsellor with an interesting hour in which the two make their own plans, for good or ill, without any guidance from the counsellor. A marriage counsellor may have a moralistic attitude toward sex, toward divorce, and toward life itself, which is conveyed to the married pair in a condemning, judging attitude. Or there may be a hedonistic, irresponsible, totally libertine attitude, which is conveyed to the pair, causing even more confusion and uncertainty on their parts.

Many times, married couples seeking a marriage counsellor are so afraid that their neighbours or their families or their employer will find out that their marriage is less than perfect that they simply look in the yellow pages of the telephone book for the names of marriage counsellors and hope for the best. Unfortunately, those who are the most unethical or the most untrained may have the most alluring advertisements in the telephone directory, and the naive married pair may therefore fall victim to quacks or incompetents. A better method of finding a competent marriage counsellor would be to get referrals from several sources. The family doctor, lawyer, or minister, a school counsellor, or a next-door neighbour may all know several marriage counsellors they can recommend, either because they have consulted them themselves or because they have heard of them. In most cases, it is wiser to avoid telling what the marital problem is when asking for the name of a qualified marriage counsellor, because few family doctors, lawyers, ministers, school counsellors, or next-door neighbours are qualified to be marriage counsellors. While they may offer good advice and sympathetic understanding, and while clergymen and family doctors provide two-thirds of all marriage counselling (Saxton, 1968), they are rarely trained in providing the couple with a completely new approach to their problems and a fresh start with each other.

The cost of counselling. If several people are asked for the name of a good marriage counsellor, and the same counsellor's name is mentioned more than once, he or she is probably a good place to start. Often, the marriage counsellors most often suggested are in private practice, with fees ranging from \$25 to \$60 an hour [Note that McCary was writing in 1975 and that most costs have gone up since then], and a married couple will hopelessly conclude that their marriage cannot be helped because they cannot afford the fee. It is remarkable that middle-class couples will think nothing of borrowing \$3000 or \$4000, or more, to finance a new car, but they react with horror to the idea of paying much less than that for counselling for themselves and their marriage. To be sure, there are couples whose incomes are not sufficient to pay any amount for private marriage counselling, but there are many other people who simply feel that payment for such an intangible service is wasted money, and they resent being charged for something they cannot drive, eat, wear, or show off, even when they have reasonable assurance of the counsellor's competence. It is these people who swell the caseloads of marriage counsellors working in community agencies that exist for those who are unable to pay for private services....

Armed with the names of qualified marriage counsellors, a couple should visit the first name on their

list and discuss frankly their financial situation and the amount of time they have to spend in counselling. They should ask the counsellor what the fees are, how counselling sessions are conducted, and what the goals in marriage counselling are. A couple may have to visit two or three counsellors before they find one who is acceptable to both, but the visits will be well worth the added expense if they result in finding a marriage counsellor who seems sympathetic, accepting, flexible, and nonbiased. He or she should be oriented toward helping the couple as they struggle to solve their own problems. No counsellor can solve the problems alone while the couple sit passively and wait for a miracle.

EFFECTIVENESS OF COUNSELLING

Considering the high probability of finding a marriage counsellor whose training is less than it should be, the percentage of couples who are helped by marriage counselling is high. According to one study, 66 percent of the people who received marriage counselling felt that the experience had helped their marriage. This is in contrast to 88 percent of subjects who found counselling helpful for personal problems not related to marital problems (Gurin et al., 1960).

The reason for the difference in effectiveness between personal and marital counselling also lies in the fact that in personal counselling the client has only himself and his own feelings to consider, and in marital counselling, there are two sets of needs and desires that are in conflict, so the chances of complete success are less. Another complicating factor in marriage counselling is the fact that couples frequently wait until every last shred of respect and love has been destroyed by their conflicts, and by the time they consult a marriage counsellor they may be doing so only in order to say to the world, "We tried everything" before they file for divorce. Couples who consult a marriage counsellor when they still feel affection and concern for one another have a greater chance of success in marital counselling.

Unrealistic expectations. Sometimes, couples will report dissatisfaction with their marital counselling experience because they entered it with unrealistic expectations. Many people believe that marriage counsellors can make their marriage happy. They cannot. They can point out to the partners the factors that cause unhappiness in their marriage, and they can help them to view their marriage from a different perspective, but they cannot wave a magic wand and bestow instant happiness on them or on their marriage.

People also frequently believe that marriage counselling can eliminate all problems in a marriage. It cannot. It can provide clarification of the problems, and alternative solutions if there are any, and suggestions as to how to live with the problem if there are no solutions.

Other people expect a marriage counsellor to be an arbiter of their differences, so that each will know who is "right" and who is "wrong." The truth is that a good marriage counsellor not only will avoid taking sides on the issues presented, but may even avoid the issues themselves, and instead deal with the emotions and feelings behind the issues. A husband may accuse his wife of extravagance, for example, asking with self-righteous indignation, "Can you believe she spent \$5 for a bar of soap?" If the marriage counsellor chastises the wife for such extravagance, he may be sure of being paid promptly, but he has done nothing but become an ally of the husband. When the two divorce, the husband may find cold comfort in the knowledge that his marriage counsellor thought his wife was extravagant, too. If the counsellor deals with the feelings of being unloved that both the husband and the wife have, and with the fact that the wife tests her husband's love by buying expensive things,

while the husband tests the wife's love by setting monetary limits on his acceptance, he may save a marriage and help two people understand themselves and each other.

In other cases, couples will expect a marriage counsellor to do all the work for them, while they passively sit like lumps of clay. A marriage counsellor who is easily frustrated may do an hour-long monologue every week in which she gives them suggestions and advice for putting some zip into their marriage. A wise and experienced therapist, on the other hand, may either out-frustrate the couple by being a bigger and more silent lump, so that they turn on her in anger and disgust and finally take the responsibility for their own problems, or she may simply tell them that they are being lumps and that she cannot deal with their marital problems unless they are willing to work on them.

A counterpart of the passive lumps are the couple who come in, not for marital counselling, but for hypnosis to make them change for the better. These are people who, again, want the therapist to do all the work, while they remain passive and feel no pain. While they recognize the need for change, they are so fearful of the pain involved and so reluctant to take any emotional risks that they want someone to change them in spite of themselves. Needless to say, hypnosis is rarely of any value in marital counselling.

Ineffective counsellors. These are some of the reasons that people may find marriage counselling less than effective, but it is unfair to place all the blame on the persons coming for marriage counselling and none on the therapist. As was said, the sad fact is that there are more ineffective marriage counsellors than there are effective ones, and there are some who are downright dangerous. The majority are ineffective not because they are quacks or because they are unscrupulous, but because they are too concerned with their own image and with being liked by the couple they counsel, and because they have unresolved marital conflicts or personal problems of their own that interfere with their objectivity or cause them to have warped approaches to certain problems. They may therefore be too ready to agree, too quick to sympathize, too willing to offer support and commendation for the things that a couple are doing right, and too hesitant to be honest about the things they are doing wrong.

A woman who is a warm, loving, efficient mother, for example, may be treating her husband as one of her children rather than as her husband. The husband may be reacting to the lack of romance in his marriage by being stubborn about money, irritable in his relations with his children, and rude to his wife. A therapist who fears injuring the feelings of such a good woman may instead praise her homemaking talents in the vain hope that she will see the light herself. He may also praise the husband for being such a good provider, for being loyal to his wife, and for being a good community leader, while hoping that the husband will see the real problem for himself and confront his wife with it. A couple with such a therapist may find satisfaction in his praise and encouragement, but not in their marriage, and the counselling experience may not help them at all. A less tactful therapist, on the other hand, may in one session point out to the wife that she is her husband's mate, not his mother, and that while she excels at being a mother, she fails at being a lover. He may also point out to the husband that his reactions are neither effective nor honest, and urge both of them to explore their personal relationship with candour and thoroughness. The wife's feelings may be hurt, and the husband may be angry, but the couple have been given the truth that their marriage needed. They may then choose to ignore it and continue in their old unhappy way, or they may choose to pursue it and see if there is a better way.

COUNSELLING TECHNIQUES

Just as there are many types of marriage counsellors, there are also many types of marriage counselling techniques. Some counsellors see each marital partner separately, and some do conjoint therapy, in which the two are seen together. Other therapists see each partner separately as well as seeing the two together. There are some therapists who insist that individual counselling is the only way; others insist that only conjoint therapy is effective. Most experienced counsellors tailor their technique to fit the situation and the persons. For some couples, individual counselling may be preferable, at least at the beginning of their counselling; for others, conjoint therapy may bring the best results.

In some cases, especially in a private clinic with several therapists, one therapist will see the wife and another therapist will see the husband. This has both advantages and disadvantages. The advantages are that the therapist who best suits the husband's personality can see the husband, while the therapist who best fits the wife's personality can see the wife. A man may resent seeing a woman therapist, while his wife may feel awkward talking to a male therapist. In other cases, the situation is reversed, and a man may prefer talking to a woman, while a wife may feel more at ease talking to a man. The disadvantages are that the two therapists may not be able to work closely enough together to have a good understanding of the dynamics within the marriage, and the underlying issues may be overlooked in favour of the presenting issues.

In most cases, it is probably best for the couple if they see the marriage counsellor individually at least once every one or two weeks, so that they can discuss aspects of their relationship that they may feel would be destructive to their marriage if discussed in a conjoint session. If either spouse is having a sexual affair, for example, and fears that the knowledge would be damaging to the other spouse, he may prefer to talk to the therapist about it and get an opinion about the advisability of telling his spouse. Or there may be emotional problems that one or both partners have that need to be explored in an individual setting.

Seeing the couple as a couple, on the other hand, allows the therapist to observe their pattern of interaction and to break up old habits of interaction that are self-defeating. The value to the clients of conjoint therapy may depend solely on the insight and skill of the therapist. For two people to continue to have the same arguments in front of their therapist that they have at home does nothing but provide entertainment and wonder for the therapist. But if the therapist can interpret their argument in a new light, and show them that they are reacting to unfulfilled needs and desires, rather than to the actions of the other, their pattern of interaction can instead become communication.

To the dismay and horror of many people in marriage counselling, communication does not necessarily lead to closeness, at least initially. We hear so frequently that if two people can only communicate, they will solve all their problems. The fact is that two people who begin to communicate may discover that they dislike what the other is communicating, and they may decide that their differences are too great to allow any closeness to ever exist between them. Communication, in fact, may not depend on one's ability to express one's feelings and beliefs clearly, but on the ability to hear and understand the feelings and beliefs of the other. Most people do express their feelings, at least in an indirect way, and communicative skills frequently involve teaching a spouse to interpret the messages the mate sends out. It is when a marital pair learn to correctly decode each other's expressed messages that they may react with dismay and hurt, and say "We don't communicate!" They are communicating; they are simply communicating messages that neither wants to hear. Marriage counselling can help a couple learn to decode each other's messages,

and to accept them as communication. Sometimes the communication experiences cause a couple to become closer together in their relationship, and other times honest communication drives them farther apart.

THE GOAL OF COUNSELLING

The goal of marriage counselling is not to keep all marriages together. Instead, it is to help couples clarify their own needs and wishes and feelings and to identify in their spouses those traits that meet their needs and those that do not. Marriage counselling aims at helping each spouse arrive at a bargaining position in many of their transactions, so that one provides a need of the other in return for having a need of his own met. It also helps each spouse to learn to give to the mate without any demand for exact exchange. If a couple insist on a purely quid pro quo (something for something) relationship, they are each denied the pleasure of giving to the other on a free basis. Without a quid pro quo basis to their relationship, however, they may each have too many needs and desires that go unanswered to feel enough generosity and lovingness toward the other to give freely without expectation of return.

Only about 8 percent of the total married population consult marriage counsellors (Gurin et al., 1960), and it is safe to say that there would be many more satisfying marriages if more people consulted competent marriage counsellors when they are unable to satisfactorily work out marital problems.

SEPARATION AND DIVORCE

If, after marriage counselling, a couple decide that their marriage is unworkable, their next decision is whether to remain together in name only, or to separate through a legal separation or divorce. If their choice is between a legal separation and a divorce, it is time to consult an attorney....

If Joe and Sheila decide to divorce ... [it would be best if they] consulted separate attorneys, even though there is relatively little in the way of cash, real estate, or other property to divide. Having separate attorneys can prevent one spouse -- usually the husband -- from agreeing to larger alimony or child-support payments than he can really afford. Or it can prevent the wife from agreeing to less than she and the children will actually need. For the majority of Americans, however, two attorneys are simply out of the question, and even the attorney fees charged by a single attorney create a hardship for many couples. It is unfortunate that the dissolution of a marriage is usually a costly process, even when there is very little property to divide. McCary, 1975.

Marital Counselling and Marital Therapy.¹ My own training is in clinical psychology (rather than marriage counselling) although, when I was in full time practice, about sixty percent of my practice was with married couples. When working with couples, it has been my experience that, when the

¹ Technically, "counselling" is most appropriate when information or advice can enable the client(s) to resolve any problems that stand in the way of achieving their goals; while "therapy" is more appropriate when the behaviour of either of the clients -- and in the long run, any satisfaction which may accrue to people in life will be determined primarily by their behaviour, i.e., by what they do -- is determined by thoughts and feelings of which he or she may be only vaguely aware, or which he or she does not fully understand (which makes it difficult for them to use any information or advice that may be given). In practice, however, the terms tend to be used interchangeably, and I have followed that convention in this handout.

relationship is in difficulty, it is usually because of personal problems that the partners have brought with them to the relationship. Thus, "couples therapy" is more common than "couples counselling" -- whether it be marital, cohabitational, separation or divorce -- and much of the time is spent working with the clients individually, to examine those personal characteristics and resolve those personal problems which underlie their relationship problems. Of course, the experiences of other practitioners may be different from my own and, unfortunately, I have no way of knowing whether or not they are more successful in helping their clients.

As you may know, there are hundreds of different approaches to counselling and psychotherapy. My own approach is both psychodynamic (focusing on those factors which caused the problem to begin), cognitive-affective-behavioural (focusing on those factors which cause the problem to continue), and educational (if psychology and relationship skills were taught in the schools, half of our work would have been done for us already). The type of treatment offered, of course, will depend on the circumstances of each individual case.

When working with couples in conflict, I have no prior commitment to their staying together or to their separating (although I have been happily married for forty-seven years and believe that marriage can be highly rewarding for both partners). I do try to help couples understand each other and get back to being friends, if they are not there already, particularly if there are children involved.

By the end of our second or third session together, I should be able to offer you my initial impressions and a verbal treatment plan, which may change somewhat as treatment progresses. I will tell you what I think about your situation. You will then be in a position to decide how you wish to proceed.

Counselling and psychotherapy are not like visiting a medical doctor, in that it always requires your very active participation. There are few instant, painless and passive cures. Nor are there any "magic pills" that you can take to make everything right. There may be homework assignments, exercises, practice sessions and record-keeping, and possibly other projects. I may suggest that you enroll in certain courses or that you join a self-help group or that you read certain books, and if you wish, I will fully discuss with you the reasoning behind any such recommendations. You and I will both have work to do, both during our sessions together and at other times during the day. You should expect that you will be required to make an effort to change some of your ways of thinking, feeling and behaving so that you can get greater

satisfaction out of life. Change may sometimes be swift, but often it will be slow and frustrating, with need for considerable repetition. I will need to hear your views on the progress we are making, and I will expect you to be open with me about them.

If, at any time, you feel uncomfortable with any part of your treatment, please discuss your concerns with me. I will be happy to assist you in obtaining a second opinion or in finding someone with whom you can feel comfortable. Remember that your welfare, and that of any children involved, is the primary concern.

Sex Therapy. Stephen Neiger, founder and former director of the Sex Information and Education Council of Canada (SIECCAN) used to say that, contrary to popular opinion, sex does not come naturally. In fact, sexual problems are fairly common. Masters and Johnson, for example, have estimated that about half of all marriages are "sexual disaster areas." Usually, this is not due to deep-seated personality problems but, rather, to lack of exposure to the information about sexuality which has only become available during the past few decades.

I do not claim to be an expert in sex therapy. However, being a psychologist, I have been exposed to more than a little information about sexuality and about the treatment of sexual problems. It may be that any problems which you have in this area can easily be fixed, perhaps simply by learning more about sexuality and/or as a by-product of improving your relationship. Alternatively, I may be able to put you in touch with someone who specializes in this area. In either event, you should feel encouraged, since many sexual problems are easily resolved.

Appointments. Psychological services such as marital counselling and marital therapy are usually provided on a once per week or once every two weeks basis, depending on the type of therapy and the client's financial situation. Insofar as possible, I will try to schedule your appointments at a regular time, at your convenience. Because I try to schedule regular appointment times for clients, I am rarely able to fill a cancelled appointment time on short notice. Except for unpredictable emergencies, therefore, you may be charged a portion of your regular fee for any sessions cancelled with less than 24 hours notice.

Reality does not always allow us to keep our commitments. However, I will try not to be late or to cancel any of your appointments, because lateness and cancelled appointments can be expected to interfere with your treatment. I

will also try to inform you of my vacations and any other scheduled absences well in advance (and you should feel free to ask about my schedule in making your own plans). If you are late, we will probably not be able to meet for the full time scheduled, as it is likely that I will have other commitments following my appointment with you.

Fees. My typical fee for counselling and psychotherapy is eighty dollars per session at present, a session being approximately 50 minutes (leaving ten minutes of the hour for record keeping related to your assessment or treatment). Fees may be set somewhat higher than that for some clients and lower for others (e.g., in case of financial hardship, for training cases, or for clients of some corporate accounts). I will not charge you any more than the agreed-upon fee for sessions which last longer than the scheduled time, except by prior agreement. Assessments which I may choose to carry out as a guide to therapy are free to you, the client.

Billing, Insurance and Payments. Payment of fees is an important aspect of any professional relationship. This is even more important in counselling and psychotherapy, where clarification of relationships and responsibilities is often an integral part of treatment. Payment is the responsibility of the client. The government-sponsored health insurance plan (O.H.I.P) does not provide any direct coverage for psychologists' services. If you wish to see this situation changed, you may attempt to bring about such change by writing to your provincial Member of Parliament and/or to the Minister of Health.

Some private health insurance programmes do provide partial (co-insurance) coverage for psychologists' services, usually as an employee fringe benefit; and you may wish to contact your employer's Personnel Office to find out whether you have such partial coverage. For some plans, you may need a physician's referral, dated before we meet, so read your plan carefully. Remember that your health insurance coverage is between you and your company, not between me and the insurance company. My receipted statement, however, should allow you to recover any health insurance benefits for which you do qualify.

If you belong to a PPO or HMO or any other "managed health care" program, they will have rules, limitations and procedures which we should discuss. For example, your plan may require that a formal assessment report be prepared, in which case I will have to charge you for that service -- at regular Ontario Psychological Association rates -- in addition to any treatment which is provided. You should be reimbursed for any such additional assessment if it is a required part of your health insurance plan. Assessment reports which

you may ask to have prepared for lawyers or others must be paid for in full before they are provided in legally signed form or released to any third party.

I do not have either a secretary or an office manager, so I would prefer that you keep track of the amount which you owe and pay it regularly. Most clients find that it is easiest for them to pay at the end of each session, but that is up to you so long as you are not in arrears by more than five hundred and fifty dollars at any given time. Receipts will be provided on request.

Confidentiality. Confidentiality is important to me. However, there are certain legal limits on the extent to which the information that you provide can be kept confidential. In each of these cases, I will consider it my lawful duty to inform the proper authorities.

- a. The law specifically requires that "A person who believes on reasonable grounds that a child is or may be in need of protection... or has reasonable grounds to suspect that [a person who is currently] a child... may have suffered abuse shall forthwith report the suspicion and the information on which it is based to a [Children's Aid] society."
- b. The law requires that health care professionals report any of their colleagues where there are reasonable grounds to believe that he or she has sexually abused a patient.
- c. Psychologists have a duty to protect their clients from committing acts of violence against either themselves or others.

If you were referred through your employee health service, and if I am required to bill your health plan or a managed health care company for your appointments with me, they will require some information about you and the services which I have provided to you, things such as your name and employee identification number, nature of the problem, the relationship to you of any other family members seen, and the dates of your appointments with me.

If you become involved with the court, and if the court knows that you are receiving or have received services from me, I may be required to appear in court with the records of my contacts with you and may be required to reveal in court any information that I have in my possession.

Child Custody and Access Issues. It is possible that, if you have children and if the two of you do not learn to resolve your differences and find satisfaction in your marriage, you may become involved in a child custody dispute. If this occurs, I want you to understand that you should engage the

services of a separate child custody evaluator specifically to assist you with any child custody and access issues (I can give you the names of several psychologists who conduct this kind of assessment). I will not be able to provide you with expert testimony in those areas, for two reasons: (1) any evaluations that I might offer on your behalf could be seen as biased because of our prior counselling or therapeutic relationship, and (2) once we begin counselling or therapy, I would prefer to focus my attention on that task rather than on other issues.

Termination. Because psychotherapy can be expected to stir up old conflicts, clients are sometimes tempted to leave therapy before their therapy goals have been reached, rather than face up to the unpleasant emotions which those old conflicts can evoke. If such unpleasant emotions do arise, please discuss them with me directly in therapy, rather than running away. Obviously, there are times to avoid one's internal conflicts, but psychotherapy is not usually one of them.

Marital counselling and marital therapy are both goal directed and time limited. Termination is inevitable. It should occur when your goals have been accomplished. Alternatively, either of us may terminate our work together if we feel that it is in your best interest to do so. However, termination of therapy should never be done precipitously. We should talk about it in advance – to review our work together, our goals and accomplishments, and any future work to be done – so that termination can be a useful and important part of your treatment programme.

RR/September 2004