



MATTERS OF THE HEART COUNSELING

243 OLD SHACKLE ISLAND RD, HENDERSONVILLE, TN 37075

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Limits of Couples Counseling & "No Secret's" Policy

Informed Consent

Couples counseling is intended to help partners improve communication, repair trust, navigate conflict, and strengthen relational connection. For this work to be effective, both individuals must be able to participate voluntarily, communicate honestly, and engage in an environment that is emotionally and physically safe.

Professional ethical standards require therapists to explain situations in which couples therapy may be limited or inappropriate. This disclosure is consistent with the **American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy (AAMFT) Code of Ethics**, which requires informed consent, protection of client welfare, and referral when appropriate care cannot be provided. These expectations also align with broader psychological ethical standards emphasizing autonomy, safety, and avoidance of harm.

The goal of this document is transparency so that you understand how certain relational conditions can affect the therapy process.

Foundations of Effective Couples Therapy

Couples therapy relies on openness, accountability, and the ability for both partners to speak without fear of retaliation or harm. The therapist's assessment and interventions depend on the accuracy of information shared and the presence of sufficient relational safety.

When these conditions are significantly compromised, ethical practice may require changes to the treatment structure. This could include shifting toward individual work, addressing safety concerns first, providing referrals, or pausing conjoint sessions.

Situations That May Limit Couples Work

Certain circumstances can interfere with the effectiveness or safety of relationship therapy. These include, but are not limited to:

- Ongoing patterns of intimidation, volatility, or threats
- Destruction of property, throwing objects, or blocking movement
- Threats toward self, partner, children, pets, or others
- Active substance abuse or untreated addiction impacting relational functioning
- Pressure, coercion, or control that affects voluntary participation
- Monitoring, isolation, or manipulation of access to resources
- Significant secrecy or ongoing undisclosed romantic involvement outside the relationship

These dynamics are widely recognized in clinical and research frameworks examining relational safety, addiction impact, and power-and-control patterns. They are not specific to any gender and are not limited to physical violence alone.

When present, they may prevent one or both partners from engaging honestly, which limits therapeutic progress and may increase risk.

Why These Conditions Matter

Couples therapy requires emotional risk-taking, truthful communication, and shared engagement. When fear, impairment, coercion, or deception are present:

- Communication may become self-protective rather than authentic
- Emotional vulnerability may feel unsafe
- Interventions may be based on incomplete information
- Progress may be minimal or misleading

Professional ethics require therapists to avoid providing treatment that may be ineffective or harmful under such conditions. Adjustments to therapy are therefore made to protect client welfare, not to assign blame or take sides.

Therapist Responsibilities

If concerns arise, the therapist may conduct additional assessment, recommend individual support, provide referrals to specialized services, or pause conjoint therapy. In situations involving credible threats of harm, legal reporting requirements may apply under state law.

These actions reflect ethical obligations to provide responsible and safe care.

Client Acknowledgment

Participation in couples counseling indicates understanding that:

- Effective therapy depends on safety, openness, and voluntary engagement
- Certain relational conditions may limit conjoint work
- Treatment recommendations may change if safety or transparency concerns emerge

Questions about any aspect of this disclosure are welcome at any time.

No Secrets Policy

Couples therapy requires transparency and alignment. For that reason, I do not maintain long-term secrets that materially impact the relationship.

By engaging in couples therapy, you acknowledge and agree to the following:

- Information shared with me individually (in session, by phone, email, or other means) **may be clinically relevant to the couple's work.**
- I reserve the right to bring such information into couples sessions when it affects relational integrity, safety, or therapeutic alignment.
- I will not collude with one partner in ways that place me in a divided or misaligned role with the couple system.

Handling Sensitive Disclosures

If a client shares information they are not yet ready to disclose to their partner, I will **not hold this indefinitely.**

Instead, I will:

- Work collaboratively with the client to prepare for disclosure
- Help determine *how, when, and in what way* the information can be shared safely and responsibly
- Support disclosure within the therapy space whenever possible
- Attend to emotional safety, pacing, and regulation for both partners

The goal is not forced or abrupt disclosure, but **ethical transparency that honors both the individual and the relationship.**

Ethical Alignment

Couples therapy works best when all parties understand that:

- The relationship itself is the client
- Secrets that fundamentally alter the relational reality undermine the therapeutic process
- My role is to support clarity, honesty, and repair—not to hold information that prevents meaningful work
- Homework may be assigned for the purpose of continued integration of the work in therapy and may not be required, but recommended.
- Should the couple refuse to participate in some of the recommended efforts or one of the partners move into a position of noncompliance, expecting their partner to be the only one making adjustments, this counselor has the right to terminate services, as relational work **REQUIRES** both parties to take ownership and adjust as the system agitates and adjusts with the therapeutic process.

By signing this agreement, you acknowledge your understanding of this policy and consent to participate in couples therapy under these conditions.

CLIENT A: _____ Date: ____/____/____

CLIENT B: _____ Date: ____/____/____

COUNSELOR: _____ Date: ____/____/____