

# ***Life-Cycle of Couples***

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# **1. Stage of Courtship (0-2yrs)**

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## **MARKETING PHASE**

- (includes singles in relationship, de-facto couples, remarried couples)
- Very strong feelings of being in love
- High sexual activity
- Tendency to not see, nor to react towards mutual differences
- Isolation from peers & family
- Many joint activities together.

## **2.**

### **Marriage/Living Together (2-5yrs)**

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#### **COUPLE WITHOUT CHILDREN**

- More attention for the world around
- Decreasing feelings of strong love & lust
- Actions to integrate with mutual peers & experimenting with family boundaries
- Careful awareness & knowledge of each others difference in a different pace
- Choice to have children
- A start to create a common history.

## **2. Counselling Ideas**

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- Further explore similarities & differences to see what is preferred by each
- Explore who makes major decisions
- Explore how family-of-origin made major decisions...& boundaries too.

### 3.

## **Couple with Young Children (5-10yrs)**

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- Creating a new combination of parenting & partnering
- Mostly stereotypic (care) task divisions
- Decreasing mutual activities
- Individual differences become more evident
- Strong decrease of sexual activity
- Larger potential problems between each other's shortcomings (conflict or avoidance)
- Fitting in grandparents & boundaries for family
- Shift in individual self-esteem as a result of stereotypes and others

**(MOST FATIGUING PHASE)** (50% don't make it)

### **3. Counselling Ideas**

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- Explore roles in the home
- Discuss jealousy (e.g., time with children)
- Whose children are they? (i.e., mum/dad/both)
- Acknowledge all the successful decisions that have been made up to now
- Couple needs to integrate differences
- Explore family-of-origin impact (in-laws' boundaries).

## 4.

### **Couple with School-Aged Kids (10-15yrs)**

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- Flexible implementation of parenthood from caring to coaching
- More attention for activities outside the relationship & new discoveries
- Space for individual challenges
- Sometimes transition from parents to companions
- Relational patterns are often crystallised & become automatic

**(MOST QUIET PHASE)**

## 4. Counselling Ideas

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- No major new challenges / changes for the couple / family...but...individuals might develop in a new area...explore this new development
- Explore each person's percentage of time / effort put into work / couple / parenting **now**, what they would like in **12 months**...compare perceptions & wishes.



## **5.**

### **Couple with Adolescents (15-20yrs)**

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- Potential tensions as a result of emerging differences in boundaries & styles
- Different engagement as parents
- Slow & cautious return from co-parent to partner (or not)
- More need to look for support & ideas outside the marriage in this unstable phase
- Development of new coalitions & groups
- Readjustment of expectations of the marriage

### **(FAMILY AS PIGEONRY)**

## **5. Counselling Ideas**

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- **Most common phase for counselling**
- Lots of stress. New differences. Unstable.
- Go out on dates & share differences
- One person does something different for 2 weeks...& the other has to guess what it is
- Use role-playing to explore experiences in the relationship.

## 6.

### **Couple with House-Fledglings (20-25yrs)**

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- Waving goodbye to children; fitting in the partner; taking care of, or losing, own parents
  - Becoming a (sexual) couple again
  - Dealing with outstanding maintenance
  - Possible tension between *Empty Nest* Vs *Freedom*
  - Alternate intense contacts by children with father or mother, and hidden or new differences show up
  - New starting point for mutual activities; creating new goals & plans
- (PHASE WITH MOST CHANGES & ADAPTATIONS)**

## **6. Counselling Ideas**

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- Repair old unfinished business
- Explores losses & gains
- Who has the \$ dictates the power / choices
- Easier work because couples know each other well
- Couple already has lots of successes.

## **7. Couple in Later Phase (25yrs+)**

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- Coping individually & relationally with loss of: Work, Illusions, Health, Friends, Sex, Wealth, etc
- Grand-parenting (how / when...yes / no?)
- Dealing with old painful issues
- Where to live
- Differences in health issues
- New relationship patterns at home around retirement illusions

## **Drastic Disturbances to Balance**

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- +1/-1 events (loss / addition which upsets the balance e.g., death, \$, moves)
- Extra-marital affairs; looking for support via sex or emotional affairs, generational connections, substances / internet
- Emotional or physical grief
- Loss of people / work / ideals
- Increasing pressure of loyalty or choice.

# Expression of Marital Problems

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- Relational statements “We cannot...” “I am unable to reach...in you...”
- Repeating conflicts. Overt: quarrels, escalations, extreme unreasonable conflicts. Covert: avoidance, withdrawing, silences, working long hours, staying up late alone.
- Psychosomatics. GP visits with vague complaints; as well as with children.
- Suddenly increasing restlessness / anxieties, panic attacks.
- Sadness and depression.
- Old emerging solution/survival strategies (over / under eating; drinking; gambling).
- Overstressed (classic spiral; home-work, work-home etc).

## **Couples At-Risk**

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- Historical relational limitations with one of the partners or both
  - Not able to enjoy / tolerate or benefit from relational differences
  - Avoiding and / or denial as fundamental coping-strategy
  - Rigid one-sided gender attitudes



# Couples At-Risk

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- Extreme high romantic expectations
  - He / she will change
  - Maintaining the exclusiveness myth
  - Not expressing *criticism* & not exchanging disappointments
- Blindness for phases
  - Not able to occupy different roles in different phases
- Hardly being able to create a common history
  - Hastily running from project to project

## **Couples At-Risk**

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- Patterns of individual re-orientation & development apart from their partner  
e.g., long-term individual therapy
- Extreme different solution-strategies & concept of how to behave as a partner  
e.g., talking Vs doing
- Childless....Projectless.

## **Remarried Couples At-Risk**

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- A very large discrepancy between the former life cycles of their marriages
- Different timing / needs of both partners
- A very short (<2yrs) interval between former marriages
- Lack of awareness of the emotional difficulties for children (i.e., couple-focused)
- The inability to give up the ideal of a traditional marriage & move to another concept of marriage

## Remarried Couples At-Risk

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- Failure to resolve fundamental issues of the former marriage/s around anger, power, & coping with differences
- Rigid efforts to draw firm boundaries around the new household members, & excluding natural (grand) parents
- Creating parental responsibilities with non-biological parent (e.g., discipline)
- Having a new baby very quickly
- Pretending it is a first marriage (i.e., “Adam & Eve Syndrome”).

## Contact:

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Consulting Rooms

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