



Assessment of the Couple

Elements of the Couples Therapy Assessment

1. Containment for the couple in crisis.
 - a. The therapist is asked to be a judge or a magician. The therapist is projected as an expert. It is demanded that the therapist provide a guarantee of an outcome.
2. Formulating the couple problem: where is the presenting problem pointing?
 - a. Don't lose the dynamic in the room being enacted. What is being enacted is the most alive version of the couple. Don't get lost in the history.
3. What makes the couple suitable for psychoanalytic treatment?
 - a. Is there a shared wish in the relationship? Can the couple deal with feelings of anger or rage. Is there any room for acceptance?
4. Assessing for risk.
 - a. Coercive Controlling Violence – Emotionally abusive intimidation, coercion, and control. Is there a violent response to this? Is there Situational Couple Violence or Separation Instigated Violence? Are children being affected?

Session Intake

1. Discuss the frame: session times, missed sessions, holiday breaks, etc.
2. Assess risks present in the relationship or the room.
3. The therapist makes space for both partners to share their experience. If this cannot occur the therapist already has a diagnostic signal in the relationship.
4. Pay attention to unspoken words in the presenting problem. There is a creative potential in difference.
5. The atmosphere of the room provides more context than the couple's words.
6. Test an early interpretation to see if the couple is open or hostile to it.
7. Avoid taking a history too soon.

Assessment of the Therapist (self-assessment)

1. If only one of the couple wants to be in therapy, the problem might be assigned to one partner who might even agree to their guilt. Can you hold the shared internal world of the couple without being divided by your countertransference?
2. If the couple comes to you with a crisis due to long-standing problems that have become acute, and they are desperate, do you feel overwhelmed by the countertransference? Do you feel the desperation to save the marriage or relationship?
3. If you offer the couple containment and you find the pressure exhausting and constant, can you hold the architecture of A Couple State of Mind for the couple? Can you avoid losing your "Otherness" in the enactments?

If any of these concerns prove true, seek supervision. Referral is an option, but it doesn't need to be the first option.