1. Stage of Courtship (0-2yrs)

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)

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

- Further explore similarities & differences to see what is preferred by each
- Explore who makes major decisions
- Explore how family-of-origin made major decisions…and boundaries too.
3. Couple with Young Children (5-10yrs)

- 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

- 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)

- 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

- 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)

- 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

- Most common phase for counselling
- 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)**

- 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)*

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6. Counselling Ideas

- 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+)

- 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

- +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

- 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

- 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

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Couples At-Risk

- 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

- 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

- A very large discrepancy between the former life cycles of their marriages
- Different hiring / 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

- 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”).
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