



## Clear Thinking Issue 115

### Learn new therapy skills online - courses start this week!

3 new therapy skills courses start this week, click below for more information:

[How to lift depression fast - starts tonight](#)

[Precision Hypnosis - starts tomorrow evening](#)

[Rewind Technique trauma treatment - starts Thursday evening](#)

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- Precision Hypnosis online training course

### 3 ways to help couples back to love (or at least like!)

*How to make relationship counselling more effective – by **Mark Tyrrell***

He sat hunched over, like a picture from a body language book captioned ‘Defensive’. Meanwhile, she ranted. Relationship counselling? More like just another slanging match. When he finally got a chance to open his mouth, his rant was the imploring kind. He wanted me to see *his* point of view, to be on *his* side. Just as she tried to justify *her* perspective. Oh dear!

Relationship counselling isn’t just about getting partners to ‘express their feelings’. Believe me, that’s not usually the problem! And in fact research has found that the happiest and longest surviving relationships are the ones in which couples know what *not* to talk about. (1) However, those couples probably aren’t the ones in your office.

Generally speaking, all the dirty laundry gets hung out. Hurt, lack of appreciation and respect, distrust, contempt, avoidance of contact, constant criticism, belittlement, aggression, loss of spark, day to day grind, money worries, sexual problems (including sex: lack of) – well, you know the routine.

So, if we don't want a couple therapy session to descend into the verbal equivalent of an all-in wrestling match, what can we, as therapists, do?

I work to three simple principles.

## 1) Lay down rules for the counselling session

I learned from the session I described above how important it is to set rules. I always set a listening rule. One partner can talk for five minutes *without interruption*. When they've had their say, then – and only then – can the partner speak.

It's amazing, when you do this, how many partners say

*I didn't know you felt like that!*

Because this may be the first time they've actually *really listened* for a very long time.

If partners interrupt, simply remind them of the 'listening rule'.

## 2) Banish criticism – from therapy and at home

We all tend to take things very personally and this isn't at all surprising when a verbal attack targets our very character and personality.

An irritated, dismissive put down like

*Oh, Eric can be such a wimp!*

doesn't really take therapy forward, in any sense. It's a sweeping, and entirely negative, attack on the 'whole' of Eric, and labels him as essentially defective.

I teach partners to talk about what they don't like in their partner's *behaviour*. So when I hear a comment like the one above, I might ask:

*Okay... yet nothing is true **all the time**. So can you tell me about a time when Eric was strong?*

In this way, an all-encompassing negativity about one's partner can begin to modify.

We can also get clients to stop using negative labels like

*He's a wimp!*

*She's controlling!*

about their partners by asking them to talk about *specific* things their partners *do* that they find difficult.

So I might ask

*What's going on and how do **you** feel, when you come to that conclusion?*

This allows them to describe their *own* position. For example:

*I find it really difficult when Eric's mother criticises me and he doesn't back me up!*

Ah... now we have something specific to work on. And this kind of communication doesn't insult Eric's core identity.

### **3) Remember closeness**

Of course, specific problem areas do need to be specifically addressed. However, the larger goal is to bring back some positive regard, respect and tenderness into a situation that may have become as tender as a snowball in your face.

Later in a relationship counselling session, after I've heard about all the rows and trouble, I might begin to talk about what first attracted these two combatants (I mean love birds). I might say:

*After everything you've told me, how in the name of Mars the god of war did you two ever get together in the first place!?*

This question often completely changes the atmosphere. Partners may even defend each other.

*She was so beautiful and I loved her creativity!*

or:

*He made me laugh and taught me to enjoy life!*

Wow!

It's been found that couples who regularly reminisce about good times – particularly times they really laughed together – have the happiest relationships.

So rather than constantly revisiting the bad stuff (which many couples may be rather too good at doing anyway), couples will get more benefit from focusing on remembering and revivifying the good times – the more, the better!

And if you're skilled in hypnosis, then you can make this even more powerful for your couple clients.

## Note

(1) According to the famous relationship researcher and psychologist John Gottman PhD, "Couples who avoid saying every critical thought when discussing touchy topics are consistently the happiest."

## Precision Hypnosis online training course

Getting couples (or anyone!) to focus on the positive, and *make use of what is already good in their lives* to help them respond effectively to their problems is not easy.

It's no use telling people to "look on the bright side!"

You have to tactfully identify, and then subtly evoke, and then gradually augment, and then firmly anchor, and then effectively utilise the appropriate positive elements, all the while making it seem like it's all their own idea.

And that's what we teach on the [Precision Hypnosis online training course](#) – among many other advanced hypnotic skills!

Good news!

There are still a few places left on the next course, which starts next week on Wednesday 16 March. Just time for you to [sign up!](#)

[Read more about the Precision Hypnosis online training course here.](#)

See you in a fortnight.

Mark Tyrrell  
Co-Founder  
Uncommon Knowledge  
Psychology trainers since 1995

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