



Skills for therapists working with couples

1. Managing Escalation

- ✓ Set ground rules if needed in session
 - Can we agree to one person speaking at a time?
- ✓ Establish *fair fighting* rules for home. Make a custom list that gets posted at home.
- ✓ Teach time-outs. Model and rehearse them in session
 - Time out! (hand signal)
 - I need to take a break. I am getting too upset
 - I'll be back in ...(> 20 minutes and < 24 hours)

2. Establishing rapport

- ✓ Join with each person. Empathize with their dilemma or difficulty
- ✓ Validate each client's perspective. Summarize how it makes sense.
- ✓ Challenge blaming and positioning instead of who is right versus wrong
 - They say you can be either married or right. But not both
 - What percent of the responsibility would you say is yours?
 - You're two different people. Of course, you have two different perspectives!

3. Being directive

- ✓ Facilitate equal air time
 - So ____, what's your perspective on this?
- ✓ Interrupt old, repetitive or blaming conversations
 - Can I interrupt you both for a minute? Is this familiar?
 - Hang on! I want hear ____'s side of the story
 - I want to go back to something you said earlier
- ✓ Encourage emotional ownership. Use sentence leaders or tag ons as needed
 - What bugs me most is...
 - What scares me most is...
 - What hurts the most is...and that makes me feel...
- ✓ Convert complaints into requests
 - And my request is...
- ✓ Introduce exercises or experiments
 - Can I ask you to switch chairs?
 - Would you be willing to try something this week?

4. Encouraging interaction

- ✓ Have them talk directly to each other
 - Can you say that to ____?
 - Can you repeat back what you just heard?
- ✓ Coach them to make direct eye contact
 - Can you look at ____ as you're saying that?
- ✓ Elicit the partner's reaction to new information or disclosures
 - Did you know that?
 - Does that make you feel closer or more distant to ____?
 - What is it like to hear that?
- ✓ Encourage any steps (approximations) toward the goal
 - Good job!
 - You're doing great!