

Talk at Workshop – Notes Final.

Workshop 2 - What works at times of real crisis – Directive and non-directive interventions?

Healing in relationships – Directive support aimed at re-building relationships on the verge of collapse – what works, and doesn't work in re-building relationships?

Couple Counselling – what it can and can't do in re-building relationships? –

Speaker – Peter Bell, Relate

Objective – To ensure that attendees understand the different objectives and outcomes from directive and non-directive approaches and can judge when each may be most appropriate

Couple Counselling – what it can and can't do in re-building relationships? –

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INTRODUCTION

Hello!

My name is Peter Bell and I work for Relate
I work as a counsellor and psychosexual therapist and
I co-manage the clinical supervision service.
I want to speak to you for about 15 minutes about counselling and what it can and can't do for relationships.

WHAT IS THE CURRENT POSITION?

The sharp eared among you may have noticed I dropped the word couple from counselling above?!!!
Relate's **mission** is "To promote health, respect and justice in couple and family relationships." And

Our **vision** is to strive towards "A future in which good couple and family relationships form the heart of a thriving society."

Because of the relative reluctance of people to seek relationship help from professionals we have widened our brief.

We have done this in 2 ways.

One, we have increased the ways in which people can interact with us

- Website
- Books
- Email
- Telephone
- Education and Training
- Counselling Services
- Work with other organisations

Two, we have widened the focus of our counselling approach from Couple Counselling to Relationship Counselling often delivered as Family Counselling.

Why have we done this?

Because we have become aware that there is a trend away from the 'simple' relationship work of marriage and couples to include a wider diversity of relationships, cultural differences and religious differences.

Our counselling approach used to be based on the idea that we were the '**experts**' and through our '**Marriage Guidance**' we could impart this knowledge and skill to our clients.

We have shifted now to a **Post Modern Social Constructionist position** in which neither we nor the client is in the expert position but through therapeutic conversations in the counselling room we can help couples and families to question their beliefs about themselves and the other family members and we can co-construct new solutions for a better family life together.

WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES?

So far so good, so what are the challenges we face in adopting this approach?

Paradoxically moving away from an 'expert' position means the counsellor/therapist needs to be more not less skilled, so it takes longer to train them.

With the Government strategy to regulate counselling and psychotherapy (to be implemented 2008), Relate must respond by creating methods of measuring internal standards of practice and training.

Relate has over the past 5 years introduced a more theoretically based and rigorous training programme, which includes teaching in systemic, psychodynamic and sex therapy. This is beginning to create the possibility of extending work into other areas not traditionally Relate territory.

Funder's are often looking for a quick fix because money is always short. Counselling and therapy are not usually quick fixes!

Working with couples and families inevitably brings counsellors and therapists into contact with domestic abuse. The knowledge about working safely in this area has expanded exponentially recently.

Up to 120 women are killed by their partners each year. For December 2003 to December 2004, we found 68 cases that had resulted in convictions for murder or manslaughter, or in which the perpetrator had committed suicide (many cases are still ongoing, or have yet to come to court).

Many of the couples who come to Relate have or are still experiencing violence in their relationship. Relate has developed specialised ways of working with this problem.

The reality of violence in relationships means that Relate needs to continue to increase the skills and qualifications of its workforce even if the Government were not demanding it for other reasons.

SO WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR RELATE?

I think all of this means the need for more partnership between organisations not less, the increasing complexity of couple and family life means that there is unlikely to be any one size fits all approach?

CONCLUSION

At the Labour Party Conference Beverley Hughes, Minister for Children, Young People and Families “We want to see a graduation of services which meet different demands”

In summary we could say that Relate has shifted from the **Freudian** (someone who has privileged knowledge of the nature of psychological problems) to the **Socratic** position (someone who has the skill to promote dialogue that leads to some new understanding and new knowledge). *Jonathan Glover.*

And as a reminder:

Neither the Relate counsellor/therapist nor the client is in the expert position but through therapeutic conversations in the counselling room we can help couples and families to question their beliefs about themselves and the other family members and we can co-construct new solutions for a better family life together.