

## Dawn Kaffel Blog Archive: Why don't couples come to counselling?

**Husband:** *“Look. Can you hear yourself? Can you? Do you have any idea what a terrible person you have become? All you give out is this endless negativity, a refusal to see any kind of light and joy, even when it's staring you in the face and a desperate need to squash any sign of happiness in me or... or... or... anyone else.*

*It's a wonder that I don't fling myself at the first kind word or gesture that comes my way, but I don't, ou... ou... ou... out of some sense of dried-up loyalty and respect, neither of which I ever bloody get in return.”*

**Wife:** *[long pause] “I checked my emails. There's one from Laura.”*

*Extract from: The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel by Deborah Moggach*

How do a previously loving couple get to this place in their relationship? Clearly the wife in the extract above has rather perfected the art of denial. We can see how, in the husband's emotional outburst that if things are ignored or denied, someone explodes.

We too can be in denial – we pretend that all is fine: *‘for the sake of the children’*, because *‘if I don't rock the boat everything will be OK’*, or *‘my family will be so disappointed in me’* and *‘We've got a lot to be grateful for’*. Sure we do, but that doesn't mean that there's no option to the very real suffering that is being experienced. Denial leads to avoidance and if we 'do' avoidance successfully, we believe we don't have to face the truth of our experience and our feelings. What happens is the suffering continues and gets worse as our feelings get stuffed further and further down.

So why don't we ask for help? There are many reasons, here are some of them:

- if we acknowledge the fact that we have a problem it makes it real and our continued avoidance becomes difficult if not impossible. What's stopping us is that we feel afraid, we wonder what might happen if we dare to face it all? We cannot imagine a positive outcome. This can lead to deep unhappiness, an affair, even illness.

- we think we've failed: the power of our culture to present the perfectly happy family is socialised into us from childhood. Deep beliefs about how we *should* feel and act are visible everywhere: in films, magazines, on the internet and social media. Little account is taken of the realities of day-to-day life. There's not enough understanding of the very normal challenges that all of us experience in our relationships. There's little idea of the importance of keeping our relationships going, it's as if *‘well, we're here now, we've got kids’* and that's it.

- *‘counselling will break us up’* – things are so terrible that it will all fall apart,

our fear ridden minds can only see what we think is the worst possible outcome.

- the counselling room will be a battleground for blame and accusation and the truth will upset or hurt my partner, making a bad situation even worse. Couple counselling can awaken long dormant sibling rivalry issues. We worry '*will the therapist love me most?*' Is it any wonder that couples struggle with the idea of counselling, never mind getting as far as seeing a therapist?

Let's deal with each of these points:

- how would it be if we felt able to talk about our relationship in a place where we can feel safe, respected and encouraged to express our feelings? To be with a well-qualified therapist who is there for both of you: experienced, skilled, willing and able to help you sort out the tangle of your daily reality and the fears and unhappiness it promotes?

- feeling that we've failed suggests that there are some expectations not being met. What are your expectations and how realistic are they? Many people have secret fears that often include feeling that they're not good enough, or it's all theirs or their partner's fault. Imagine the relief and release of being able to express your fears and feelings openly and without judgement.

- fear of vulnerability and shame that we can't work it out ourselves leaves many couples waiting far too long to go to counselling. This delay can lead to further unnecessary frustrations and unhappiness.

- being terrified that going to counselling will '*break us up*' and '*it'll be a battleground between me and my partner.*' This ignores the very common outcome that we haven't considered - that it can help you to very positively repair and re-build your relationship, to learn together how to do things differently, to connect and to be happier, to remember that you love each other and want to be together.

Relationship breakdown is a slow process and you should expect that it will take time to rebuild. Great relationships don't just happen, they need to be nurtured and maintained. If only a small percentage of the effort and energy that goes into arranging the 'perfect' wedding or managing our jobs was put into our day-to-day relationships, couples counsellors would be out of a job.

Don't be afraid – it takes courage to ask for help – but, hard as it to believe, positive change can happen.

It is also very important to see a properly trained couples counsellor who specialises in working with couples and is accredited by a professional body.

If you would like to discuss things further or to make an appointment, you can call me on **07976 403741** or **(020) 8959 9528**. Alternatively you can contact me by email by clicking [here](#).

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