

2019 MIPA Presentation: *How to Effectively Use Individual and Family Therapy in Divorce and Custody Matters: Why One Size Does not Fit All*

**Dr. Cotter's Cheat Sheet for making therapy successful**

Before referring people to counseling consider asking these questions

**1. What is the purpose of this counseling? What is the intended outcome of counseling?**

**Individual Counseling:** The purpose is to identify and resolve problem areas within an individual which are causing that person significant distress or impairment on their ability to function in their life, or to consistently adequately fulfill crucial roles in their life. (especially parenting/co-parenting roles)

**Family Counseling:** Purpose is to identify dysfunction(s) within a family system which impairs family functioning and/or is causing family members significant distress or impairment in their ability to function in their life.

**2. Know the difference between Practical obstacles vs Emotional/Psychological obstacles**

The decision to file for divorce is a decision made by one person impacting multiple people. As a family progresses through the stages of divorce it evokes the emotional and psychological reactions often cloud people's judgement. When a case reaches a bottleneck therapist should look at whether people are stuck because there is an inability to answer practical questions of how to move forward vs using divorce proceeding as a stage to play out their unresolved emotional/psychological issues.

*(A person's spouse files for divorce then they discover infidelity and uses divorce proceedings to publicize the fact in order to appease feeling of helplessness and victimization.)*

**3. Identifying a problem vs attaining a FUNCTIONAL solution:**

It's not that difficult to see when families are in conflict, chaos, or crisis. The narrative that comes to define the case is usually couched in terms of what is wrong rather than what course of action is best. The key to attaining a FUNCTIONAL solution is to first determine the best possible solution for each given family, at that given time, with the resources they have to work with in that moment.

1. Divorcing Clients: Functional/Practical Divorce vs Emotional Divorce *(There are predictable issues that individuals and families face pre-JOD)*
2. Divorced Clients: Identifying the source of problem: Practical issues vs Emotional issues *(Post-JOD issues are fraught with anticipatory anxiety of building the foundations of a new life surrounded by uncertainty.)*
3. Custody Conflicts: Identifying the source of problem: Practical issues vs Emotional issues *(Discerning when inappropriate parental behavior reaches the threshold for the court to take action vs counseling tools for better parenting.)*
4. Parenting Time Issues: Identifying the source of problem: Practical issues vs Emotional issues

**4. Skeleton Key (it unlocks almost any door): Ask yourself this... "Is this a CANNOT or a WILL NOT?"**

Think of CANNOT as when somebody is not capable of doing what is their best interest.