Individual Planning: A Treatment Plan Overview for Adults Experiencing Intimate or Marital Problems.

Spend at least one hour completing a treatment plan. Many couples face marriage problems that they work through. Such challenges don’t naturally lead to divorce, but can even strengthen a relationship, depending on how they are handled. However, handling marriage problems in a healthy way can be very challenging, especially because stressors in a marriage can come from many different sources. The following are some of the most popular sources of marital stress and marriage problems.

Money
Stress and fighting over money constitute one of the most oft-cited marriage problems that couples face. Generally speaking, when couples fight about money, their dispute is really symbolic of something different: power struggles, different values, or other issues that surround money. However, in tough economic times, financial stress can actually cause more general stress, and more conflict over things unrelated to money, as well as money-centered arguments. (For example, when one partner is extremely stressed about money, they may be less patient and more stressed in general; they may then pick fights with the other partner about unrelated things without even realizing it!)

Children
The advent of children brings another potential source of marriage problems. Children are wonderful, and can bring wonderful and meaningful gifts into our lives. However, having children can bring additional stress into a marriage because the caretaking of children requires more responsibility as well as a change in roles, provides more fodder for disagreement and strain, and reduces the amount of time available to bond as a couple. This combination can test even the strongest of bonds.

Daily Stress
Daily stressors don’t need to equal marriage problems, but they can exacerbate problems that already exist. As with financial stress, general daily stress can test patience and optimism, leaving couples with less to give to one another emotionally.

Busy Schedules
Marriage problems can result from overly-busy schedules for a few reasons. First, couples who are very busy may find themselves generally stressed as well, especially if they’re not taking care of themselves with quality sleep and good nutrition. Additionally, they may find themselves less connected because they have less time to spend together, and more
separateness in their lives. Finally, if they don’t work together as a team (even if their responsibilities are completely separate, if they don’t coordinate to cover all responsibilities well), they may find themselves fighting over who’s taking care of which household and social responsibilities. Again, while busy schedules don’t automatically lead to marriage problems, they don present a challenge that needs to be worked through.

Poor Communication
Perhaps the biggest predictor of marriage problems is **poor communication**, or negative communication that belies damaging attitudes and dynamics within the relationship. Negative communication is so damaging, in fact, that researcher John Gottman and his team have been able to predict with a very high degree of certainty which newlywed couples would later divorce, based on watching their communication dynamics for a few minutes! Healthy communication is key; unhealthy communication can lead to major marriage problems.

Bad Habits
Sometimes couples experience marriage problems that could be solved if the two could notice their habits and change them. People don’t always make a conscious decision to argue over petty things, nag and be critical, or leave messes for the other to clean, for example. People just get into negative patterns of relating, fall into lazy personal habits, or get into a rut that they perpetuate out of habit.

Fortunately, these marriage problems can be worked on. Even if only one partner is consciously trying to change, any change can bring a shift in the dynamic of the relationship, which can bring positive results.

Sexual Problems
Sexual problems in marriage are often the result of a lack of communication. If there is not enough sex or even too much then that is something you will need to discuss with your partner or else things could get worse. Sex is something that can easily break a couple up or keep them together, which one is up to you. It is an intimate form of physical and emotional bonding that goes beyond just getting off or having fun, it’s a way of getting to know your partner on a deeper even spiritual level.

Behavioral Definitions for In for Adult’s Experiencing Intimate or Marital Problems:

- Frequent arguing with spouse or significant other.
- Lack of communication with spouse or partner.
- A behavior pattern of angry projection of responsibility for the conflicts onto the other spouse or partner.
- Possible or present marital separation.
- Possible or pending divorce.
- Involvement in multiple intimate relationships while married or with partner.
- History physical or verbal abuse in a relationship.
A behavior pattern of superficial or no communication, or infrequent or no sexual contact.

A behavior pattern of repeated broken, conflictual relationships because of personal deficiencies in problem solving, maintaining a trust relationship, or choosing abusive or dysfunctional partners.

A pattern of excessive involvement in activities (work or recreation) that allows for avoidance of closeness to spouse.

Long Term Goals for Adults Experiencing Intimate or Marital Problems:

Help the acceptance of the termination of the relationship.

Help develop the necessary skills for effective, open communication.

Help develop mutually satisfying sexual intimacy, and enjoyable time for companionship within the relationship.

Increase awareness of his or her own role in the relationship conflicts.

Increase respect for significant other in the relationship.

Learn to identify and list escalating behaviors that lead to abuse.

Help make a commitment to one intimate relationship at a time.

Rebuild positive self image associated with the broken relationship.

Short Term Goals for Adults Experiencing Intimate or Marital Problems:

Agree to attend, and participate in conjoint sessions with spouse or significant other.

Identify and list positive aspects of present relationship.

Identify and list the causes for past and present conflicts within the marriage or relationship.

Identify and list his or her own role in the conflicts and the changes that must take place to improve the relationship.

Identify and list the changes needed to improve the relationship.

Help make a commitment to attempt to change specific behaviors that have been identified by self or other as problematic.

Increase the frequency and quality of the communication with spouse or partner.

Decrease critical complaining by learning how to reframe each complaint into a polite request.

Help verbalize thoughts and feelings regarding the relationship in a direct, non-aggressive manner.
Identify and list and express expectations both partners have for the relationship.

Recognize own responsibility to meet some needs of significant other in the relationship.

Teach conflict resolution techniques to resolve issues reasonably.

Identify and list a behavior pattern in repeatedly used in a destructive manner in intimate relationships.

Identify and lists escalating behaviors that often lead to verbal or physical abuse.

Agree to a time out signal that either partner may give to stop interaction that may become abusive.

Reach an agreement to the connection between substance abuse and the conflicts in the present relationship.

Chemically dependent spouse or partner agrees to pursue treatment and seek sober living.

Identify and list the messages behind a spouse or partner's infidelity.

Identify and list the causes for and consequences of one spouse or partner's infidelity.

Assess the level of closeness or distance desired in a relationship and how level may relate to fears of intimacy.

Share family and childhood history with each other to increase understanding and empathy.

Increase quality time spent in enjoyable contact with spouse.

Define and start verbal and physical affection behaviors toward spouse.

Identify or rule out any sexual dysfunction.

Identify and list patterns of sexual behavior, beliefs, and attitudes that exist in each family of origin.

Reach an agreement to commit to the establishment of healthy, mutually satisfying sexual attitudes and behavior, and stop any reflection of destructive earlier experiences.

Discuss feelings associated with grieving the loss of the relationship (such as, denial, guilt).

Verbalize plans as to how to better cope with loneliness.

Interventions or Strategies for Adults Experiencing Intimate or Marital Problems:

Start conjoint sessions with significant other with a focus on increasing communication and learning problem solving skills.

Help patient in identify and list behaviors that focus on positive relationship building.

Develop a list of positive things about the relationship and positive things about the spouse
or partner.

Spend the time between sessions noticing and recording in journals the positive things that are present in the relationship. Do not show their journal material to the other but only during therapy sessions.

Assess present or ongoing conflicts regarding the relationship.

Assign patient to read information on marital conflict and resolution and process key ideas with therapist.

Confront any avoidance or projection of responsibility for conflicts within the relationship.

Develop a list of changes needed for self to improve relationship.

Identify and list changes the other needs to make to improve the relationship.

Agree to a commitment to begin to work on changing specific behaviors on his or her own list and on the list of the partner for him or her.

Process changes each partner believes are necessary to improve the relationship.

Set aside 10 minutes that are distraction free 2 to 3 times each week during which they can communicate about conflict issues. Practice during therapy session and at home. Explore thoughts, feelings with each partner in following session.

Refer to attend a skills based marital relationship workshop.

Help clarify communication and expression of feelings within therapy sessions.

Assign daily talk with spouse about previously chosen, non emotional, non conflictual areas.

Teach the couple to reframe a complaint into a request and to seek agreement from the spouse or partner to reinforce meeting the request.

Teach assertiveness.

Refer patient to a group that will educate and teach assertiveness skills via lectures and assignments.

Confront any irrational beliefs and unrealistic expectations regarding relationships.

Assist couple in adopting more realistic beliefs and expectations of each other and of the relationship.

Teach key concepts that mutually satisfying relationships necessitate, and requires each partner being willing at some times to sacrifice his or her own needs and desires to chose to meet the needs and desires of the other.

Teach the couple conflict resolution techniques like -Do's & Don'ts List- and -Fair Fighting Steps- (Bach and Wyden) and practice these techniques in therapy sessions and at home.
Assess family of origin history to see patterns of destructive intimate relationship interaction repeating in the present relationship.

Complete a personal history of each partner of previous dysfunctional intimate relationships.

Request a list of escalating behaviors that occur prior to abusive behavior.

Help partners in identify and list a clear verbal or behavioral signals to be used to terminate interaction immediately if either fears possible abuse.

Complete a written agreement from both partners that the time-out signal will be responded to favorably and be used without debate.

Assess the role of substance abuse in precipitating conflict or abuse in the relationship.

Refer for substance abuse treatment for the chemically dependent partner.

Assist the couple identify and listing the message behind the infidelity.

Assess individual needs that motivate maintaining multiple intimate relationships.

Explore the consequences to self and others that result from having multiple intimate relationships.

Direct patients to attend a workshop or read on relationship skills.

Assess and clarify feelings associated with loss of the relationship.

Assess fears regarding getting too close and feeling open and vulnerable to hurt, rejection, or abandonment.

Teach Imago exercise where each shares with the other childhood wounds they experienced to expand understanding and sharing. (Format to be used: Recall the incident; tell what you enjoyed about being with parents; next, tell how you were hurt by parents; and last, tell what you wanted from them but never got. Repeat these steps for each incident.)

Complete a genogram and then share in conjoint session each genogram with the other to promote greater empathy and awareness concerning each other.

Identify and list rewarding, shared social recreational activities with partner.

Encourage patients to attend a couple’s enrichment or retreat weekend.

Assess any resistance in initiating affectionate or sexual interactions with spouse or partner.

Assess the nature of their sexual relationship to determine or rule out any sexual issues.

Complete referral to a physician treating sexual dysfunction for an evaluation.

Complete a sexual history to determine areas of strength and to identify and list areas of dysfunction.

Use conjoint session to complete a sexual genogram which identifies sex patterns of
behavior, activities, and beliefs for the couple and their extended family.

Help reach a commitment to attempt to develop healthy, mutually satisfying sexual beliefs, attitudes, and behavior that are independent and free of previous childhood, personal, or family training or experience or history.

Refer to a support group or divorce seminar to assist in resolving the loss and adjust to single life again.

Support, and encourage patient in adjustment to living alone and being single.

Increase awareness of the community resources and social opportunities that are available.

Help develop a specific plans regarding building new social relationships to overcome loneliness, withdrawal, and fear of rejection.