

CORE TASKS OF BECOMING AN EFFECTIVE COUPLES THERAPIST AT RTC

Below is an extensive lists of the tasks to become a master couples therapist. This is an 8-10 year list. However, over the next 2 years – my hope is that you will cover at least 65% of the tasks. The purpose of this list is to give you structure and a benchmark for you to strive for. *The purpose is not to overwhelm you.* If you find yourself feeling overwhelmed either put the list away, or pick one of the core tasks and focus on that.

A note about the tasks below: We will teach you a specific way of fulfilling each of the tasks below. However, we understand for most of the tasks there are multiple pathways. We ask that you learn it our way – and once you have that down – then start adjusting and molding the tasks to your own personal style.

1. **Understand deliberate practice and how to employ it to become a better therapist, specifically:**
 - a. Understand the overall arc of therapists and outcome scores.
 - b. Understand the process of TAR (Think, Act, Reflect) and how to improve as a therapist.
 - c. Be using the *Live Supervision & Deliberate Practice Follow Up Form*.
2. **Understand the fundamental facts of therapy:**
 - a. Psychotherapy is effective (effective size of .7-.8 which is 4 times the effect size of people who do not seek treatment = .2)
 - b. Dropouts are one of the biggest problems of therapy – around 47% of clients unilaterally end therapy
 - c. Deterioration – 10% of therapy clients get worse. Therapists are atrocious at detecting these people (which is why the ORS is so important)
 - d. Therapists on average rate themselves at the 80th percentile. Only 4% of therapists rate themselves as average and no one rates themselves as below average.
 - e. Know what accounts for change in therapy and what does not account for change.
 - f. Understand that **no treatment model is superior to any others regarding actual outcome. They are all the same.**
3. **Have a significant couples assessment process – including:**
 - a. Having a 3 session assessment
 - b. Having specific goals for each assessment session
 - c. Have a written intake packet which relates back to your theory of couples therapy.
 - d. Have a specific compiling procedure for questionnaires and interviews
 - e. Be able to create a treatment plan for couples based on your theory of couples therapy and the information compiled in the assessment process.
4. **Know your own structure of couples therapy – including the following:**
 - a. Have a clear spiel about your process of couples therapy (assessment and treatment)

- b. Have a clear process and policy of how you work with confidentiality and secrets
- c. Have a clear way of contracting with clients after the assessment process
- d. Have a list of specific factors you need from clients in order to be able to succeed.
- e. Your typical order of how you address issues (e.g. do you address attachment injuries first or do you work on getting the client to own their own part).
- f. Know your non-negotiables for therapy (what are you not willing to deal with).
- g. Know how to create leverage and the understand why it's so important

5. Have a cohesive theory of couples therapy including:

- a. How do couples change?
- b. Why do couples become entrenched in conflict and distance?
- c. How do couples connect?
- d. What conditions need to be fulfilled for couples to connect?
- e. What is the purpose of relationships? Conflict? Distance?
- f. What are the main impediments to couples therapy being effective?

For our purpose – we will use the Atkinson model as a base. Be proficient in the following:

- a. How to get the necessary information from the first sessions (especially internal thoughts and catching them in contempt).
- b. Be very proficient at giving the *Getting on Board* and *Kiss of Death* interventions. This means having them memorized – not just winging them.
 - i. Be proficient at getting clients on board and helping them stay on board
 - ii. Know the *Most Common Objections* by heart and be able to recite them to clients.
- c. Know the *Habits of People Who Know How To Get their Partners to Treat Them Well: Dealing with Differences* (Atkinson manual chapter 2)
- d. Know the conflict escalation process and how to teach it (listen to Atkinson CD #1)
 - iii. Specifically – know how to teach “How to stand up for yourself without making a big deal of it”)
- e. Understand the Core Differences in Maintaining Emotional Stability (Chapter 3 in Atkinson’s manual)
- f. Know the 6 things that are actually wrong in relationships (see Chapter 5 in Atkinson Manual)
- g. Understand the Obvious Offenses and the Disagreement Related Offenses (Chapter 5 in Atkinson Manual)
- h. Be proficient in Atkinson’s letter writing process (Chapter 7)
- i. Be proficient in creating audio recordings for your clients and using them to work on client’s internal dialogue and the reconditioning process.

6. Have a repertoire of activities and interventions you use in session and out of session

with couples – including:

- a. Having easy access to the worksheets
- b. Create a list of all the different types of worksheets you want to use
 - i. Create a list of worksheets you can use nested under the different types of



worksheets noted above (or a binder with the worksheets printed out)

- 7. Understand the importance of the therapeutic relationship by:**
 - a. Being able to join strongly with couples in the first session while both are in the same room
 - b. Being able to join strongly with couples and individuals
 - c. Understand the relationship is the therapist's responsibility – not the clients
 - d. Understand the numerous ways of influencing clients and be proficient in least 10 of them (e.g. Atkinson's *Cultivating Receptivity*) and be able to identify them when others are using them.

- 8. Be able to work with and heal attachment injuries with couples**
 - a. Be proficient in using Dan Wile and the overall process
 - b. Be proficient at the Atkinson method of owning their own part and using the letter writing to "*Lay your weapon down.*"

- 9. Know your own specific step by step process of leading couples through the most common presenting complaints in couples therapy, including:**
 - a. Affairs/Betrayals
 - b. Excessive Conflict
 - c. Distance
 - d. Discernment

- 10. Be able to help couples deal with conflict. See above for all of the aspects related to Atkinson.**

- 11. Be able to help couples connect and stay connected and maintain adequate levels of Fondness & Admiration**
 - a. Have at least 5 ways of getting couples to connect in session
 - b. Have practiced at least 3 experiential interventions in session and understand some theory of how these interventions work and how to create your own.

- 12. Use FIT to identify couples who are at risk and provide a higher level of service.**
 - a. Have a clear understanding for yourself of why you're using FIT (name at least 5 reasons)
 - b. Have a clear spiel for clients for introducing FIT, the ORS, and the SRS.
 - c. Be able to recite 4 important statistics by heart about FIT.
 - d. Know the 3 main indicators of client's dropping out and/or having a negative or null outcome.
 - e. Use the MyOutcomes scatterplot on a weekly basis to check in and identify clients at risk.
 - f. Be receiving regular feedback from the SRS that routinely helps you change the

course of therapy.

- g. Be practicing FIT in such a way that it is integral to your therapy process – not just an administrative task.
- h. Understand your own statistics and how you compare to the norms. Use those statistics to improve your therapy skills.

13. Understand a specific trauma model (we will teach you PIT).

- a. Be proficient in educating your clients about (All in the Pia handout *Overview of Developmental Immaturity*):
- b. The 5 core issues and
 - i. Their respective nature of the child
 - ii. Their respective Secondary symptoms
 - iii. And respective relational problems
- c. Understand the 3 roles, where they come from, and how they manifest in relationships
- d. Understand age regression and how it manifests itself in relationships

14. Have a good sense of your own triggers in couples therapy and understand where those triggers come from, specifically:

- a. Know what type of clients you feel aversion to and what you need to do with those clients. What types of clients are difficult to find compassion for?
- b. Know which type of clients you feel bound by and feel compelled to help (it's not necessarily a choice)

15. Be able to engage in adequate levels of taking care of yourself, specifically:

- a. Know what self-care is to you. Understand what level of self-care you need to maintain in order to feel emotionally stable and happy.

16. Know your own boundaries around engaging with clients, specifically:

- i. Knowing when you're giving too much to your clients
- ii. What types of clients do you struggle with having good boundaries with? What type of clients are you good at having boundaries with.