

Advanced Couples Therapy Packet

This packet is designed for couples counseling and includes structured exercises for understanding conflict patterns, attachment triggers, de-escalation techniques, forgiveness processing, and Christian marital reflection.

Instructions: Complete the exercises individually unless otherwise specified. Bring the completed reflections to your counseling session for discussion.

1. Criticism–Defensiveness Conflict Cycle

Many couples become trapped in a repeating pattern: criticism leads to defensiveness, which escalates into emotional withdrawal or counterattack. Recognizing this cycle is the first step toward interrupting it.

Describe a recent argument and identify where criticism or defensiveness occurred:

2. Attachment Triggers in Marriage

Attachment patterns influence how partners react during conflict. Anxious partners may fear rejection or abandonment, while avoidant partners may withdraw or shut down when conflict feels overwhelming.

Reflect on what triggers your emotional reactions during disagreements:

3. Conflict De■Escalation Scripts

When arguments escalate, couples can slow the conversation using prepared scripts. Examples include: 'I want to understand you better' or 'Let's pause so we can talk calmly.' Write phrases you can use to calm conflict:

4. Forgiveness and Reconciliation Exercise

Forgiveness does not mean ignoring hurt; it means acknowledging pain and choosing to release resentment. Reflect on areas where forgiveness may be needed:

5. Christian Marriage Covenant Reflection

Healthy marriages often include shared commitments to grace, humility, patience, and sacrificial love. Write commitments you would like to make to your spouse:

6. Emotional Needs Reflection

What makes you feel most loved and valued in this marriage?

What behaviors make you feel misunderstood or hurt?

7. Appreciation Exercise

Each partner writes several things they appreciate about the other person. This exercise helps shift attention toward positive behaviors.

8. Communication Improvement Plan

Write specific ways you will improve communication with your spouse this week:

Therapist Guide for Facilitating Exercises

1. Introduce the conflict cycle exercise and help couples identify their typical escalation pattern. 2. Discuss attachment triggers and normalize emotional reactions. 3. Practice de-escalation scripts during session role-plays. 4. Use forgiveness reflections to guide deeper emotional processing. 5. Encourage couples to revisit their written commitments weekly.