

# SEPTEMBER NEWSLETTER

## Who is Couples Counselling Really For?



We all have the image of what we think couples counselling is and who it's for. It's *obviously* for the couple who's marriage is going down the tubes, who fight all the time, or worse don't even speak to each other.

This is a more classic view of couples counselling. Each couple is so unique and has so many layers together and as individuals that couples counselling is and can be so much more!

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As a therapist and a couples counsellor I want to say that it's for everyone. I personally believe everyone can benefit from therapy and encourage everyone I know to go and I even go myself. This is a biased view.

But in saying that, it is well known individual therapy and couples counselling is optimal when it's done proactively. Couples work is most effective when both partners are willing to participate, but it doesn't mean your marriage or relationship is falling apart. It's also for when we know there are major changes in relationships or external stressors. We can then anticipate the stress that your relationship may undergo and ensure you have the skills to navigate and cope, therefore becoming an even stronger couple.

So, who should go?

### Soon-To-Be Parents/ New Parents

Becoming a parent is one of the largest changes a person will ever experience in their lifetime. You now have a little person that is totally dependant on you and your partner. To make it harder you will also be utterly exhausted. Preparing for and experiencing this shift can be stressful and it is important that both you and your partner are communicating clearly and effectively, but also that you are on the same page while understanding each others needs and wants. It's a lot. With a couples therapist you can work together to explore parenting styles, effective communication, boundaries with extended family and how you both remain team without losing yourselves.

### Turn Around Workers

'Oh he's out this week'. 'I'll make it but I'll be coming alone'. 'No, I missed it, but I heard it was a good time'. This is the lingo and lifestyle of a turn around worker and their partner.

Although it is often a consistent schedule it can be taxing. There is so much to catch up on when they come back and so much that can be missed. Therapy can help with the constant change and the feeling that sometimes life is happening around you and you're not necessarily part of it.



***COUPLES COUNSELLING IS MOST EFFECTIVE WHEN IT'S DONE PROACTIVELY.***





With these couples we focus on communication, quality time and building systems and structure within the relationship and family so when someone leaves or comes home everyone knows what to expect and can pick up where you left off.

## Couples Who Have Been Married for A Long Time

You have been together for years, you have found your rhythm and you can't imagine life without your partner, but it's predictable. Dare I even say boring?

Sometimes couples need to remember what it's like to connect and have fun again, like it was at the beginning. You may not be the same people you were when you first met so exploring what fun looks like now is important. Keeping a relationships exciting can help ward off boredom or feeling like things are stagnant and bring you closer together. With these couples we work to build enjoyment into your daily routine, learn to date (each other) again, surprise one another, learn each others love languages and how to speak them and explore doing things differently to shake it up.

## Pre-Marital/ Post-Marital

Marriage is a major life change it brings a lot of excitement, anticipation and stress.

When preparing for a wedding it can be helpful to seek professional help to deal with premarital stress, set boundaries and ensure that you and your partner are on the same page. It is also a great time check in to see if there are any major topics you and your partner need to discuss and figure out before tying the knot.

One of the most important things I tell pre-marital couples is that **you are not only marrying the person in front of you, but every version they are going to become.**

Once married that can bring a lot of changes too, especially if you recently moved in together. As a married couple you are now living in the world as a team which can provide challenges. The wedding blues are also a real feeling,



in that after you are married it may not feel like you have anything big or special coming up and it can create feelings of sadness. You may also feel like the honeymoon period has worn off and now life has become mundane. These are all things we discuss in therapy. Together we look at navigating the world with a partner, communication, supporting one another, understanding your partners wants and needs as well as figure out what's next in your marriage and what you both want as individuals and as a couple.

### For a Check Up

Couples counselling does not have to be for something huge, life changing or hard. Sometimes it's truly just a check up.

It has been reported that 69% of conflict within a relationship is perpetual. Meaning some things just keep popping, and that's okay. You can come to couples therapy to get new skills, spice up date night, have a difficult conversation, explore setting or reevaluating boundaries or to get a fresh perspective on a perpetual conflict.



Whatever your need therapists are here to help you and your partner become the most functional, healthy, content couple that you can be!

## Booking Your Couples Session

It's easy and just like booking an individual therapy session. However at Align Chiropractic and Wellness couples counselling sessions are only offered in-person. This was done very consciously. Part of couples counselling is strengthening connection and deepening the relationship, that is a difficult thing to do over a virtual platform.

The initial consultation can be done virtually (it's 15 minutes long) so that is more accessible. In consultation we talk about what you would like to work on, you can ask as many questions as you would like, we get to know one another and discuss potential ways to help you reach your goals!

After your consultation and we feel that we are a good fit for one another you and your partner and book the first session!

# Trauma Culture: When Labels Prevent Healing

The very well meaning trauma movement has come with an unexpected problem; people are misdiagnosing their own pain by oversimplifying what trauma really is.

In the past five-ish years we have seen a huge acceptance of trauma, gaining traction in both popular culture and mental health circles. This acceptance is great, but also comes with a serious risk. It has transformed the word 'trauma' from clinical jargon to a catch-all label. Now the term 'trauma' is everywhere, being used to describe childhood adversity to mild setbacks, from major life events to everyday stressors. While the shift in using the word 'trauma' reflects the growing shift in mental health awareness it is also, unintentionally, teaching people to pathologize normal human distress.

Trauma is defined as a deeply distressing or disturbing experience that can have lasting negative impacts on a persons mental and emotional wellbeing. It often is results from events that overwhelm the individual leaving them unable to cope which can create feeling of being unsafe, disconnected or emotionally dysregulated.

Experiencing trauma can have many consequences and potentially lasting impacts. However, you cannot be stuck in 'survival mode' as popular media and culture leads you to believe. This tendency makes people think that they are irreparably damaged or fundamentally flawed.



The truth is you are only in survival mode while experiencing fight, flight, fawn or freeze (also known as fight or flight); which is a temporary reaction to danger. Meaning people are either already shifting into a calmer state, or experiencing the pain that comes with being human. We can experience dangerous and threatening things without it creating lasting dysfunction, for example having a traumatic experience in childhood isn't the same as having a traumatizing childhood.

## If Not Everything is Trauma, What Is It?

Emotional suffering operates on a spectrum, like many things. Each level of experience uses different brain circuits and requires different approaches to resolve or heal the experience. A basic example of the spectrum includes;



**Emotional Pain:** Notify's us that something needs attention, it's information about our experience. Similar to how physical pain tells us we're hurt.

**Emotional Wounds:** Hurt deeper and need to be processed. Your brain won't fully move on until it understands what happened and how you got there so you can have better results in the future.



**Trauma:** An ongoing injury that has or is rewiring your nervous system's threat detection. This leaves you hyperaware, emotionally numb, disconnected, having flashbacks and essentially perpetually ready to jump into fight or flight even when safe. This continues on to impact your entire system including digestion, sleep and immune system.

These are just three examples of where you can be on the spectrum, you might be somewhere in between. Each person's experience and how they interpret that experience is unique. Therefore, each therapeutic treatment plan is tailored specifically to that individual to meet their needs and help them heal in an effective and appropriate way.

*Using trauma therapy for everyday emotional wounds is like performing surgery on a bruise—well-intentioned but potentially harmful. Scars are not in need of healing tools because they are the proof that the wound is closed!*

*-Antonieta Contreras*

## With Awareness Comes Responsibility

When we understand that not all emotional suffering is trauma we can become, and help others become, more resilient by accessing self-empowerment. We can start by letting our nervous system know we can handle fear and stress. Through these conversations we can shift our perspective from victimization to one of agency.

Let's think before we label.

Do we really know what that label means before we claim that that's what it is? How educated are we on what we are claiming? Labels should really only be used when we know what they mean. This isn't about minimizing anyone's suffering. It's about honouring the full spectrum of human emotional experience and those who truly live life with those experiences. With this you can move from saying "I'm traumatized" to "I'm human, and this is how humans respond to pain".

If you feel unsure if you've experienced trauma, that's okay. This is when it is a good time to research your experiences and speak to a professional. Your pain deserves the right name and the right care. Not all wounds are trauma, and not all suffering means damage. Sometimes the most radical thing you can do is trust yourself and your own capacity to heal—once you understand what you're actually healing from.

## 3 Mental Health Tips for Back to School

Getting back to school is a big transition from summer for the whole family. Here are 3 mental health tips to have a successful transition.

1) Take some time to think about what going back to school will look like. It's natural for children (and parents) to feel nervous before the first day. Give them space to express their feelings, thoughts or concerns. This is also a great time to remind them about what they enjoy about school.

2) Normalize the topic of summer coming to an end. This can happen through reintroducing their schedule, starting a countdown on the family calendar or introducing snack times similar to their school schedule. This can help reduce stress and behavioural issues in the classroom by creating consistency while helping them know what to expect.

3) Set a 'wind-down' time before bed. Begin implementing calming activities before bedtime to help them prepare for the school year schedule and move their bedtime closer to their school schedule in the days leading up to the first day. By doing this you can ensure that your child is fully rested and their brain has time to relax making falling asleep that much easier.

By helping your child resume a schedule and creating open and safe spaces talk about back to school feelings you can help reduce the stressors they may feel leading up to the first day. Helping them have the most successful first month possible!

## Updates, This & That

### Clinic Closure

Please note that the clinic will be closed Labour Day weekend. **We will not be open September 1st.**