

# **Dickens Marriage Therapy & Coaching Informed Consent Form**

## ***Section 1: About Dickens Marriage Therapy & Coaching***

Dickens Marriage Therapy & Coaching specializes in helping repair distressed marriages. All of our therapist and coaches have at minimum a Masters Degree in Marriage & Family Therapy, Social Science or Professional Counseling.

We use a combined approach of Gottman Couples Therapy & Emotionally Focused Couples Therapy (EFT). By using both of these approaches our success rate based on research from real couples going through this process is 89%. You can see the research studies on our website at [dickensmarriagetherapy.com](http://dickensmarriagetherapy.com).

## ***Section 2:***

### ***Stage 1: Assessment***

**Session 1:** Duration - 1 hour session.

This is an in person relationship oral interview. We will ask you questions about your relationship history as well as attempt to understand the pattern of conflict you are getting caught in. As well as you will need to fill out the relationship inventory to be scored.

**Session 2:** Duration - 90Min session. We will go over the scores of your relationship inventory and integrate the scores with the answers you gave your marriage specialist in your first session. This session is designed for us to come up with a collaborative treatment plan that includes what we will be doing in our weekly sessions with each other but also in what you will be doing at home with each other.

### ***Stage 2: De-escalation***

Begin work on repairing the negative pattern of interaction that you get stuck in. The negative pattern will most likely have these four patterns of communication called the four horsemen of relationship apocalypse because we know from the research that if these four behaviors are alive in the relationship the relationship has an 86% possibility for divorce.

#### **1. Criticism**

The first horseman is criticism. Criticizing your partner is different than offering a critique or voicing a complaint. The latter two are about specific issues, whereas the former is an ad hominem attack. It is an attack on your partner at the core of their character. In effect, you are dismantling their whole being when you criticize.

#### **2. Contempt**

The second horseman is contempt. When we communicate in this state, we are truly mean—we treat others with disrespect, mock them with sarcasm, ridicule, call them names, and mimic or use body language such as eye-rolling or scoffing. The target of contempt is made to feel despised and worthless.

Contempt goes far beyond criticism. While criticism attacks your partner's character, contempt assumes a position of moral superiority over them:

### 3. Defensiveness

The third horseman is defensiveness, and it is typically a response to criticism. We've all been defensive, and this horseman is nearly omnipresent when relationships are on the rocks. When we feel unjustly accused, we fish for excuses and play the innocent victim so that our partner will back off.

### 4. Stonewalling

The fourth horseman is stonewalling, which is usually a response to contempt. Stonewalling occurs when the listener withdraws from the interaction, shuts down, and simply stops responding to their partner. Rather than confronting the issues with their partner, people who stonewall can make evasive maneuvers such as tuning out, turning away, acting busy, or engaging in obsessive or distracting behaviors.

It takes time for the negativity created by the first three horsemen to become overwhelming enough that stonewalling becomes an understandable "out," but when it does, it frequently becomes a bad habit. And unfortunately, stonewalling isn't easy to stop. It is a result of feeling physiologically flooded, and when we stonewall, we may not even be in a physiological state where we can discuss things rationally.

Thus our goal in **Stage 2 - De-Escalation** is to eliminate these four behaviors that drive the negative pattern of interaction that you get stuck in.

## ***Stage 3: Creating Connection***

A healthy, safe and securely connected marriage is built on 6 key areas. The research calls this the sound relationship house because if all of these 6 key areas are present in your relationship, your relationship will take care of you and provide for all of you and your spouses needs.

### **#1: Build Love Maps**

Like building a house, relationships need a firm foundation. The foundation for strong relationships is to build Love Maps of one another's world; to learn what is important to one another.

### **#2: Fondness & Admiration**

Couples need to share Fondness and Admiration with one another; to tell each other what they want, like and appreciate. Everyone wants to believe that their partner cares about them and that they are more important than anything else in the world. We believe that we are important to our partners when they notice that we need them; when they are willing to stop the world to pay attention to us when we need it.

### #3 Turning Toward

We demonstrate that we are “there for each other” by Turning Toward one another; by paying attention on purpose to our partners. When we hurt, they are there. If all three of these levels are working well then a Positive Perspective results; the relationship feels like a safe place to be. We tend to believe that our partners mean well, even when they let us down or hurt us.

### #4 Managing and Repairing Conflict.

Conflict is inevitable and useful; it needs to be constructive; therefore, couples need to learn to Manage Conflict when it occurs. We need to learn how to say what we need to say in a way that it can be heard. We need to be able to listen to our partners and to communicate that we have heard them.

### #5 Make Life Dreams Come True

We need to be curious about our partner’s dreams, hopes and aspirations so that we can Make Life Dreams Come True.

### #6 Create Shared Meaning

We need to “write the story of us”, to Create Shared Meaning that will enhance life now, and give us fond memories in the future.

## THE SOUND RELATIONSHIP HOUSE THEORY

Developed by John Gottman, Ph.D. and Julie Gottman, Ph.D.

Pioneers in relationship science, Drs. John and Julie Gottman have revolutionized our understanding of marriage, relationships, and couples therapy. They draw upon four decades of breakthrough research with more than 3,000 couples. The Sound Relationship House Theory is the foundation of the Gottman Method, which uses a practical approach to help couples break through barriers to achieve greater understanding, connection, and intimacy in their relationships.

### WHAT CAN YOU DO NOW TO MAKE YOUR RELATIONSHIP WORK?

#### **Build Love Maps**

- Maintain awareness of your partner’s world

#### **Share Fondness and Admiration**

- Make deposits into the Emotional Bank Account

#### **Turn Towards Instead of Away**

- Accept bids for emotional connection

#### **The Positive Perspective**

- A positive perspective occurs when the friendship of your marriage is strong

#### **Manage Conflict**

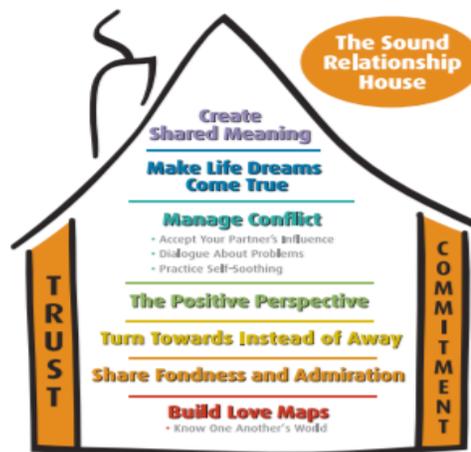
- Accept influence from your partner: be open to compromise
- Discuss your problems: take turns listening to one another about perpetual issues
- Practice self-soothing: keep yourself calm

#### **Make Life Dreams Come True**

- Find ways to support each other’s life goals and dreams

#### **Create Shared Meaning**

- Build a shared sense of purpose. What is your mission and legacy?



### WHAT ABOUT TRUST AND COMMITMENT?

5 ways to build trust, love, and loyalty in your relationship:

1. Make trustworthiness a main priority in your relationship
2. Act to maximize your partner’s well-being
3. Know that trust is built in small positive moments
4. Avoid negative comparisons
5. Generate frequent thoughts and acts that cherish your partner’s positive qualities and minimize your focus on their negative faults

### ***Section 3: Duration of Therapy/Requirements***

Typically the duration of therapy lasts anywhere from 14 hours – 36 hours to create a secure emotional connection and safe relationship. The average time majority of couples spend in therapy is 20 hours based on the research. And my experience with couples is that the norm is usually 20 hours to get through the therapy process.

The duration of therapy of how long therapy is for you and your spouse is dependent upon these 5 factors.

#### **First Factor: Developmental Trauma**

First is developmental trauma whether be emotional, physical neglect or emotional, verbal, physical or sexual abuse. The reason developmental trauma could extend duration of therapy is due to parts of your brain that are designed for relationships, regulation of emotion, empathy, compassion, resilience, and repairing connection are offline and the parts of your brain that is designed to survive trauma is activated and is in hyper arousal due to the fact that your brains number one responsibility is for survival and other people have been seen as dangerous.

Your body/brain and nervous system felt safety in relationships were formed in your developmental years and creates a expectation of what to expect in a close relationship implicitly/automatically/unconsciously. Thus when men and women get married their partner becomes deep family in their brains and they will not have the right brain activation to ensure that they live a life of secure and safe connection. And their brains will be programmed for survival due to the unsafe nature of close relationships. Thus it will take longer due to the severity of violations of human connection.

Men and women brains/bodies/nervous systems who as children and teens grew up in homes that were filled with empathy, joy, warmth, comfort, nurturing and repair know that relationships are safe and that they can both rely on their partner for everything and anything and they know their partner will be there for them.

The good news is that your brain is neuroplastic and the parts of your brain that is designed for survival such as your amygdala, hypothalamus can slowly be deactivated with corrective emotional and relational experience. And the parts of your brain such as the hippocampus, right brain, insula, and middle prefrontal cortex which is all responsible for empathy, courage, resilience, emotional regulation, compassion and repair can be activated!

Neurons that wire together fire together and in order to create new neurons in the parts of your brain that are responsible for empathy, compassion, courage, resilience, etc. is formed by new experiences. Your brain is an experiential organ meaning that only through new experiences will you change your brain. Thus we can create a secure and safe relationship with each other if only we have new experiences together!

#### **Second Factor: Intensity and Duration of Disconnection.**

If you have 20 plus years of chronic disconnection it will take more hours in therapy compared to someone who has only 3 years of chronic disconnection. The reason is simple because your brain does not trust your partner will be there for you when you need them based on 20 plus years of that experience. In comparison a couple who only has 3 years of chronic disconnection will take less time because they lack of trust in their partner is not as severe in their brain due to only 3 years of experience rather than 20 years.

The only exception to this rule is the intensity of disconnection. In which there is physical or strong emotional abuse that is happening. And in the case of physical or strong emotional abuse we may not be able to work together due to the threat and lack of safety that one partner presents.

Connection is all about safety and trust. It is about trusting that my partner will be there for me when I need them most. So the safer your brain and body feels coming into therapy the quicker the time will be in therapy.

### **Third Factor: Homework**

The third factor is the homework. This program includes exercises and actions that you both must take during the week. The more serious you are about the homework section the faster the process will go.

## ***Section 4: Fees, Payment & Scheduling***

### **Fees:**

At Dickens Marriage Therapy & Coaching, we have 3 levels of marriage specialist to be able to meet your needs. These levels are based on experience and certification levels. The fees for each level are as follows.

Level 1 - \$150 per 1hr

A level 1 marriage specialist has there masters degree in a counseling related field, completed Gottman Therapist Level 1 and gone through the Emotionally Focused Therapy certification program. They have at least 500 hours of recorded successful clinical work with couples.

Level 2 - \$175 per 1hr

A level 2 marriage specialist has there masters degree in a counseling related field, completed Gottman Therapist Level 2 and gone through the Emotionally Focused Therapy certification program. They have at least 1,000 hours of recorded successful clinical work with couples.

Level 3 - \$200 per 1hr

A level 3 marriage specialist has there masters degree in a counseling related field, completed Gottman Therapist Level 3 and gone through the Emotionally Focused Therapy certification program. They have at least 2,500 hours of recorded successful clinical work with couples.

### **Payment Options:**

1. Venmo – Dickens\_MarriageTherapy or Luke Dickens

2. Square w/ 2.75% add on credit card usage fee.
3. Personal Check
4. Apple Pay

### **Session Length**

We offer 1hr, 90min and 2hr sessions. Our most popular option is the 90min session, the second most popular option is 2hrs and the third most popular option is 1hr. The time you choose is up to you, but we recommend starting out Stage 2: De-escalation at the 90min to 2hr session per week and then when we move to Stage 3: Creating Connection to go to down to 90min to an 1hr session per week.

### **Scheduling:**

- Dickens Marriage Therapy & Coaching has a 24 hours cancellation policy. Meaning to cancel 24 hours prior to your session start time. If you cancel within the 24 hour cancellation policy you are required to pay for half of your session cost.
- Dickens Marriage Therapy & Coaching does allow one cancellation within the 24 hour window. We know life can be chaotic and sometimes you get sick or something happens at home.

## ***Section 5: Duration of Time in Treatment***

### ***Duration of each stage:***

Stage 1: Assessment

- 2.5 hours

Stage 2: De-escalation

- 8-24 hours

Stage 3: Creating Connection

- 4-15 hours

## ***Section 5: Videoing sessions.***

We will sometimes bring out a video recorder for your sessions. This is for him to be able to rewatch the sessions and see if he is missing anything in order to best assist you. If you are uncomfortable with being video taped then let him know at the onset of therapy and he will forgo the possibility of videoing your sessions.

## ***Section 6: Contraindications to Therapy***

### **1<sup>st</sup> Contraindication: Ongoing Affair**

Luke does help marriages who suffer from an affair. But if a couple comes into his office and the affair is ongoing he will stop therapy immediately. Therapy process helps couples feel connected and safe

with each other and an ongoing affair does not lead to connection with the couple nor does it make the partner feel safe.

Now if a partner wants to end an ongoing affair and ensure that the affair is over, then Luke will see the couple again if both spouses want to see Luke for their marriage.

### **2<sup>nd</sup> Contraindication: Current Physical Abuse**

Creating trust and safety are key themes in creating connection with couples who come through the therapy process. When there is current physical abuse, it is impossible to create any type of safety in the injured partner.

If there is past abuse and the injured partner wants to do therapy with their spouse, I will have to assess the situation to ensure that therapy is best option for the couple moving forward.

As long as the injured partner wants to do therapy with their spouse, and the offending partner shows remorse for their actions, therapy possibly could move forward.

### **3<sup>rd</sup> Contraindication: Active Addiction**

Therapy cannot occur with addiction in which one or both spouses do not acknowledge their addictive processes, like alcohol, drugs, pornography, gambling, etc. Also therapy cannot occur if there is no willingness outside of marriage therapy process to seek help for the habit.

If there is acknowledgment and willingness to seek help for the habit, therapy can occur.

### **4<sup>th</sup> Contraindication: Rigid Blaming**

If one partner is rigidly blaming of their partner as being entirely responsible for the problem such as attributing a mental illness in their partner as the problem and they are unwilling to engage in the process of tracking the negative pattern, safety will not be able to occur and therapy will not be able to occur.

But if both partners are will to engage in the process then therapy process may continue.

## ***Section 8: Exceptions to confidentiality***

Everything that happens in therapy is confidential. Confidentiality may only be broken according to State of Texas Laws. We will have to contact the appropriate authorities in the following instances.

- Child Abuse
- Physical Neglect of Child
- Physical Abuse of Spouse in which a child gets hit
- Severe threat of violence to another specific human being.

Please sign below if you agree to the terms listed above.

Name of Spouse 1: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Spouse 1: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Spouse 2: \_\_\_\_\_

Spouse 2: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_