

Couples find comfort in counselling

A willingness to invest in yourself and each other, and manage conflict respectfully, is key to relationship bliss.

It takes courage for partners in long-term relationships to admit when they need help. However counselling can be an invaluable investment in their future together.

"I admire the courage that people have to come and be vulnerable with someone else," says Amanda Cotta, a psychologist at Engage 1on1 Psychology.

"It's not easy. But we have strategies we can teach them to help them on a journey to strengthen their relationship."

Psychologists at Engage 1on1 specialise in a range of therapy styles and areas of mental health including cognitive-behavioural therapy, self-compassion therapy, acceptance commitment therapy, play-based therapy, mindfulness, trauma, anxiety, depression and anger management.

Cotta has counselled a range of clients in different settings for more than 20 years, and has level 2 certification training for the Gottman Method, an evidence-based approach to couples therapy.

Developed by renowned psychologists Dr John Gottman and his wife Dr Julie Gottman, the Gottman Method is based on decades-long research into romantic relationships and marriage.

John Gottman studied couples in 'love labs', where he documented their interactions as well as heart rates, facial



Evidence-based research is helping couples strengthen friendship, love and intimacy.

expressions and blood pressure.

"The results of this research challenged some of the common ideas about therapy," says Cotta. "At one stage it was assumed it was beneficial for couples to vent their anger in therapy, and they would invest time during sessions to resolve conflict."

The evidence-based Gottman Method, however, asserts that most disagreements between couples are perpetual, based on personality differences and have no perfect resolution.

Therapists using the Gottman Method

work with couples to help them understand one another and learn to negotiate their relationship based on their individual personalities. "The couples I work with find it rewarding," says Cotta.

"They breathe a sigh of relief when they become aware that they don't need to resolve all conflicts, but learn how to manage them."

"It is important to understand each person in the relationship. It is useful to go back to their personal stories to see why they may not be able to come to a compromise on particular issues."

"It's about being able to manage conflict in a calm and respectful way, and that continues to build a relationship rather than tear it down."

Couples who work with Cotta and other psychologists using the Gottman approach begin with four assessment sessions,

'We have strategies ... to help [couples] on a journey to strengthen their relationship.'

Amanda Cotta

including an extensive questionnaire about their relationship.

When Cotta sees a couple for a fourth session, she provides feedback and a plan for addressing their relationship challenges.

Gottman Sound Relationship House mapping is used as a framework for creating a stronger relationship.

"It helps to build up the friendship, love and intimacy between that couple as they share deeper parts of themselves that may be impacting their relationship," Cotta says.

Willingness to invest in themselves and each other is an important step in relationship conflict management and the Gottman Method facilitates the repair and creation of shared meaning, she says.

In addition to couples therapy, Engage 1on1 psychologists provide counselling services in more than 40 Melbourne primary and secondary schools and provide child, adolescent and adult counselling services at clinics in Northcote and Forest Hill.

Psychology Services

Engage 1on1 provides psychology services for people of all ages - children, adolescents, adults and couples. We see GP referred clients, paediatrician referred clients and private clients for counselling and intervention therapy.

Engage 1on1 Child & Adolescent Psychologists also provide services embedded within over 40 Primary and Secondary schools located throughout metropolitan Melbourne, at no cost to school or parents, supported through the use of GP Mental Health Care Plans, supporting young people to develop ongoing emotional resilience, improve self-confidence and adopt a positive approach to engaging with life.

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