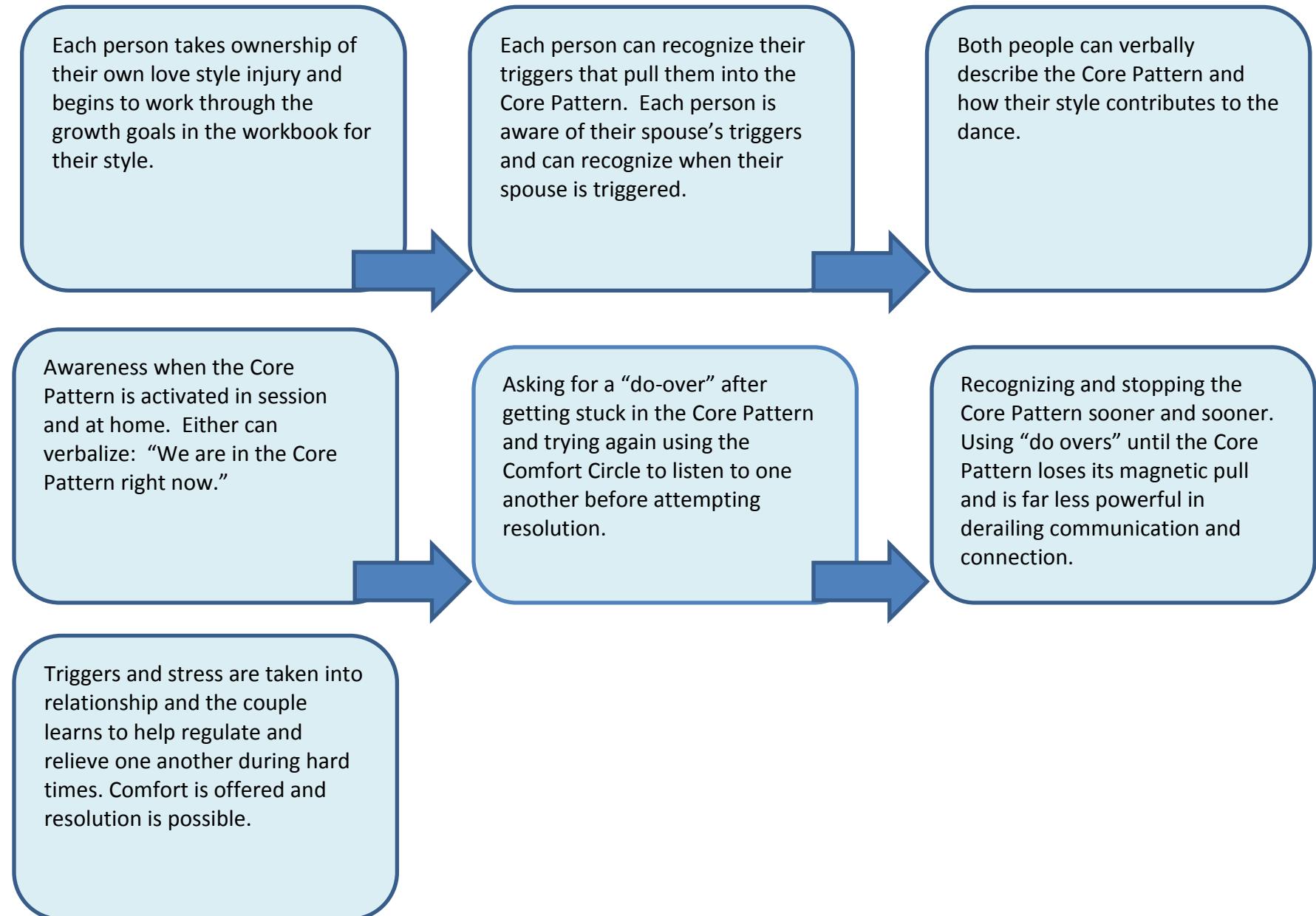


ATTACHMENT CORE PATTERN THERAPY™

STAGES OF GROWTH

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Attachment Core Pattern Therapy™

An Overview of the healing journey

Introduction:

- Attachment Core Pattern Therapy™ is the name for our approach to couples' therapy.
- The case for couples' therapy vs. individual therapy: No matter how reactive, it is rare that we split couples up into individual therapy. Regulation is best learned within primary attachment relationship and individual therapy does not accomplish these goals as readily as couples' therapy.

General Principles:

1. Attachment styles ("love styles" *How We Love*, 2006) are the result of successful or unsuccessful bonding and attachment experiences in our family of origin. Successful experiences create a Secure Attachment and less successful experiences result in the wounded attachment styles of Avoider, Pleaser, Vacillator, Controller and Victim.
2. Our first attachment experiences (positive or negative) occur within our formative years from birth to six years of age. Attachment styles are reactivity patterns that are first stored in the right brain as *implicit* memories during preverbal years. As adults these feeling states can be remembered when we are emotionally triggered. This unconscious learning is activated during interactions with others and is triggered non-verbally. Sixty percent to ninety percent of all communication between couples is non-verbal, expressed through body language, eye contact, facial expressions, voice tone, gestures and the timing and intensity of responses. Implicit memories are "wordless memories" and are experienced by couples as a flood of emotions, positive or negative, during non-verbal interchanges. Explicit memories of attachment (2 years old and up) include left brain interaction as a child gains language skills. Later these memories can be consciously recalled.
3. These emotional reactivity patterns are also stress responses ("fight": Vacillators & Controllers; "flight": Avoiders; "freeze": Pleasers & Victims). They are entirely reflexive in nature and were learned so long ago that they feel natural and normal to the individual. The average person has little self-awareness or ability to describe their reactivity pattern, feelings states or the origins of their reactivity.
4. When two of these wounded love styles connect in adult romantic relationship the couple unwittingly re-creates a primary attachment relationship similar to their family of origin. Eventually when the facades begin to disappear and conflict ensues, a Core Pattern of reactivity begins to form which becomes a fight, or frustrating pattern of relating, that repeats over and over. These Core Patterns created by colliding attachment wounds are automatic, predictable and as far as the couple goes, involuntary.
5. The Comfort Circle repeated over and over, first in the therapy office, and later at home, allows the couple to experience, in adult hood, the missing childhood stages of emotional and cognitive development that were not experienced in their family of origin. In trips around the Comfort Circle couples learn or improve:

- Self-awareness: The ability to describe the *psuche* (Koine Greek =soul, inner man, psyche, > psychology.) Each develops an awareness of a wide range of emotions and the ability to articulate and describe feelings states. Feelings tell us what we need so the each spouse learns to directly ask for what they need.
- Other attunement: With higher self-awareness and improved listening skills we learn to see and respect others on a deeper level.
- To identify triggers and learn to soothe and regulate the resulting reactivity in the presence of a primary attachment figure who triggers you.
- Empathy for themselves and spouse with respect to the childhood wounds that shaped the destructive attachment style (love style). With this comes the ability to see the little child within themselves and each other. This increases compassion and decreases the belief that my spouse purposefully withholds, is stubborn or intentionally hurts me.
- There is a wound or lack of skills fueling each spouses' annoying behavior which, with understanding and practice, can be changed.
- A newly defined sense of "self" and "other" that allows the person to learn to "ask" someone for help.
- Increased capacities to tolerate the distress of "not-knowing", i.e. unresolved issues, answers and dilemmas as well as delayed gratification and impulse control.
- Bonding begins to take place between the couple as they empathically listen and meet one another's needs.
- Boundaries for protection as well as the ability to learn to separate from others and be okay alone.
- It's okay to **not** be okay. In many homes this was not true for our clients.
- Integrating good and bad, learning to live in a *gray scale* versus black & white, right or wrong, all or nothing.
- Individuating and differentiating vs. enmeshment, fusion and co-dependency with others.
- The ability to lead, be equal and to follow others.

6. Over time, a coherent autobiographical sketch begins to materialize which is vital to emotional healing.
7. Eventually, individuals feel more "adult like" and relational triggers, which felt fatal and final as a child, begin to be seen as manageable, therefore less threatening. Their inner age begins to match their chronological age.
8. As the emotional capacities and skills of couple increases, the therapist/leader has worked themselves out of a job.

Group Leader/Therapist role:

1. To be directive and assertive! You are taking them to a new place which means you must be in charge of the session. They must follow you. They do not have the answers "within" so indirect therapy models do not work well with couples.
2. To contain and regulate each of the individuals as you take them (often with resistance) around the Comfort Circle.

3. Each broken attachment style is lacking some or all of the above mentioned developmental stages, so you are teaching and emphasizing a specific growth goal(s) as the couple goes around the Comfort Circle.
4. Constant psycho-education of the above listed items is imperative. Couples need to be reminded of the purpose of the Comfort Circle and the goals they are working toward; self-awareness, other awareness, emotional regulation, knowing their mate and being known, repairing ruptures, etc. The goal is earned security.
5. The ultimate goal is for them to learn the Core Pattern so well, that they immediately know when they are in it, and have the skills to exit the pattern. Progress means the couple will begin to manage the Core Pattern instead of it managing them. We remind them weekly, "It's your choice to take charge of the Core Pattern." Either it will manage you or you will manage it!"
6. By referring to the "Core Pattern" in the third person, they begin to realize they are mutually fighting a common enemy which can begin to unite them.
7. A good couples' therapist will always be sought after and they will always be full. Good couples' therapists are very hard to find; perhaps it's because couples' therapy is not for the faint of heart! A good paradigm (attachment) and a road map (How We Love) are of great help in this work.

A note from Milan and Kay:

Due to our Christian beliefs, we often speak in churches and our faith is deeply intertwined with our work. We believe one of the most important interventions to bring healing to relationships is prayer. The Christian gospel is the story of rupture, repair and restoration. God sent his Son Jesus to provide payment for our sin so we can enter into a relationship with a holy God, clean, forgiven and restored. The offering of this gift involved *initiation*; the coming of Jesus into a messy, broken world, as well as *sacrifice and pain*; Jesus's death on the cross. As we accept this gift of love, we enter into a secure connection with God, becoming a member of his family, with a promise we will never be abandoned.

This serves as a model for healing our relationships. Overcoming these core patterns means we must *initiate* and move towards pain, not away from it, with a focus on restoration and redemption. We must be willing to *sacrifice* and embrace the *pain* of taking on our own wounds as well as the injuries of our mate learning to repair ruptures. This kind of love and commitment builds a deep trust and bond. Over time, our marriage can become our most secure connection and provide a charted path to lead others into healing, freedom and joy.

Praying as an individual and as a couple, is a powerful intervention at any point around the core pattern as we seek to escape the pull of the destructive dance and find the freedom of secure connection. Our prayers are with you and for you on this journey.

Blessings, Milan and Kay