Marriage Counseling Homework & Cheat Sheet

**Goals for Each Session:**

1. Establish hope
2. Affirm commitment
3. Identify the heart issue
4. Assign homework to effect change

**INTIMACY - 5 Love Languages:**

1. Acts of Service
2. Physical Touch
3. Words of Affirmation
4. Gift Giving
5. Quality Time

**Keys to Identifying Heart Issues:**

1. What do they grumble about?
2. When are they angry?
3. When do they escape?
4. When are they anxious?
5. \*What are they tempted by? James 1:14 says the sinful desire is already in their hearts, the temptations they give in to are just a manifestation of that desire. This may take some digging.

**COMMUNICATION – Dealing with Anger:**

1. Be slow to anger
2. Acknowledge when you feel angry
3. Think through your goals and determine which goals are blocked by the spouses behavior; seek to meet your spouse’s needs
4. Assume responsibility for the goal of ministering to your spouse
5. Express negative feelings if doing so serves a good purpose (but **not** hurtfully or vengefully)

**CAUTIONS:**

1. Beware partner dominance
2. You probably aren’t getting the whole story up front
3. Don’t allow interruptions
4. Take baby steps.
5. One topic per session, don’t get side tracked

**COMMUNICATION & FORGIVENESS – Love Busters:**

1. Angry Outbursts
2. Disrespectful Judgments
3. Annoying Behaviors
4. Selfish Demands
5. Dishonesty

Have each partner describe how THEY fail in each of these areas, the other partner is not allowed to add to their partner’s list or nod enthusiastically. Make a list of what each says. Then have them each come up with ways they can improve their behavior, note these as well. Assign as homework.

**COMMUNICATION - Active Listening:**

Have each partner take turns making a list of 2-3 things they would like to see more or less of in their relationship and describe how that would make them feel. The other partner repeats back what they heard. (Ex: “I would like it if we held hands more, because it would make me feel more loved.”)

Use “I” and “We” language, not “You”.

**COMMUNICATION – Steps to Changing How We Communicate:**

1. Identify the difficulty
2. Don’t try to change everything at once (baby steps)
3. Begin w/ positive reminiscences
4. Analyze situations carefully
5. Keep the goal in mind: better communication

**COMMUNICATION – Miracle Script:**

Have each partner describe what perfect communication would look like in their marriage. They must put ways it would look for both their spouse and themselves. Language must be positive and not accusatory (Ex: “Joe wouldn’t come home screaming about how terrible his day at work was and chew me out for wanting attention!” is bad, “Joe would come home and explain that he had a bad day and ask for some time to unwind before we talk about our days” is good.

**INTIMACY–Building Intimacy Homework:**

1. Date night. Each spouse plans what they think the perfect date for their spouse would be. Do both dates over a week or two.
2. Love list. Each spouse writes down 5 ways (not 4!) to show their spouse love each day (and does them). Discuss results the next session.

**FORGIVENESS – Making a List:**

Say something like, “Sometimes it’s helpful to talk about times we’ve forgiven each other in the past first.” Have each spouse make a list separately on paper of times they have forgiven their spouse and their spouse has forgiven them. They must come up with at least 3 instances of each. They must be specific.

**INTIMACY – Sex:**

Sex is much more than being naked with someone. It’s one of the most vulnerable and intimate moments a couple can experience. Ever wonder why that really nice, beautiful girl stays with the loser guy who treats her terribly? Sex. Sex promotes emotional bonds and connections that are meant for the marriage relationship.

This isn’t something you generally discuss in the first session w/ a couple in crisis, but as things begin to heal or if appropriate (they are fighting about sex), discuss it. Perhaps preface the discussion with a statement like, “This is none of my business, and normally would never ask, but it’s vital to talk about in a marriage relationship…” If counseling as a couple, this may mean more coming from the wife.

Encourage them to not be the once a month couple. Not even the once a week couple. Have sex frequently. It’s Bible: 1 Corinthians 7:1-5.

**FORGIVENESS – Identifying Barriers:**

If there seems to be barriers to forgiveness the easiest way to ID them is to ask, “What keeps you from forgiving him/her?” If they can’t come up with any reasons, assign it as homework and talk about it next time. When you get their list, talk about ways to removing those barriers.

Evaluate the answers. Are they reasonable? Do they reveal other heart issues?

**FORGIVENESS – Writing a Letter:**

If one or both partners seem to be having trouble forgiving or empathizing it can become very frustrating for everyone.

Say something like, “Joe, you seem to be having trouble seeing things from Sally’s perspective. That happens sometimes in counseling situations and can be hard when the pressure is on. So instead lets back away for a little bit. This week, I want you each to write a letter from the OTHER person’s perspective. Try to be as accurate as possible. No snark.”

**INTIMACY & FORGIVENESS – Promoting Confession:**

Confession promotes intimacy and closeness in a relationship if done properly. Encourage and promote it whenever possible, with statements such as, “What would happen if one of you had confessed the things you did that were wrong and asked for forgiveness?”

**Confession involves**:

1. Seeing that the other person is hurt
2. Seeing oneself as a contributor to the marital problem\*
3. Agreeing that one’s actions are wrong
4. Desiring to change hurtful actions

Most people will agree that marital problems are partly both partners’ fault, but in when it comes to playing that out in their own marriage it generally doesn’t happen. Encourage them to see both sides, encourage empathy, and be empathetic yourself. Remind them frequently of their goal: restoration of the marriage.

**Forgiveness involves:**

1. Feeling wronged.
2. Forgiving genuine debt. Name the sin, don’t shrug it off.
3. Forgiveness is costly. It cost God is own Son. It may cost you your pride, your rights, and your revenge.
4. Generosity. God forgave you generously and freely and asks you to do the same. Not because they deserve it. Not because they earned it. Not because based on how much they have or haven’t suffered, or even if they have or haven’t repented.