**What does discernment counselling involve?**

Retrieved & adapted from <http://www.cehd.umn.edu/fsos/projects/mcb/couples.asp>

The discernment counsellor helps individuals and couples decide whether to try to restore their relationship/marriage to health, move towards separation/divorce, or take a time out for a specified period of time and decide later. The sessions are divided between conversations with the couple together and individual conversations with each spouse. The counsellor respects the reasons for separation/divorce while trying to open up the possibility of restoring the relationship/marriage to health.

The counsellor emphasizes the importance of each party seeing his or her own contributions to the problems and the possible solutions. This will be useful in future relationships even if this one ends. Discernment counselling is considered successful when people have clarity and confidence in their decision.

When a decision emerges, the counsellor helps the parties either to find professionals who can help them have a constructive divorce or to formulate a reconciliation work plan to create a healthy, successful relationship/marriage. In some cases, couples decide to take a time out from the discernment process and return later.

**How many sessions are there?**

Discernment counselling occurs over one to a maximum of five counselling sessions which explore which path to take. This is to avoid precipitous decisions to separate or to try reconciliation. A decision may sometimes be clear after one to three sessions.

When one or both partners are unsure or reluctant to try & salvage the relationship in therapy, it is best that counselling be a short-term process with the goal of achieving greater clarity about whether to try to restore the relationship or continue towards separation. The immediate decision is whether to carve out a 6 month period of an all-out effort to restore the relationship to health, with separation off the table during this time. At the end of six months, they can put the separation decision back on the table, based on what they’ve learned about the possibility of successfully rebuilding their relationship.

**I don’t claim to be doing couples therapy** until I have an informed agreement with both partners to work on the relationship. That way, if the unsure partner says that the relationship counselling isn’t working, I can point out that they haven’t tried relationship counselling yet. They’ve been doing Discernment Counselling which is helping them decide whether to try relationship counselling. It’s like not being able to say the antibiotic isn’t helping to clear up the infection if you haven’t taken yet it.

**Discernment counselling is NOT suitable when**

* one spouse has made a final decision to divorce and wants counselling to encourage the other spouse accept that decision
* there is a danger of domestic violence
* there is an Order of Protection/AVO from the court
* one spouse is coercing the other to participate
* there is abuse, ongoing affairs, addictions, or serious irresponsibility.