

The Question of Primary Attachment

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Q: My couple brought up the question of their relationship as being an attachment relationship. I said that I thought they may be right. Should I have said that?

A: When they are talking about such things such as whether or not they are each other's primary attachment figure you tell them that it's not up for discussion. It is a fact. It is a fact they are each other's primary attachment figure and this is why it is so hard for them. And that is also why the therapist is easier. And you can always challenge questions like, "Why can

talk to you or I can talk to my friends and this doesn't happen?" You say in response, "Okay marry your friend and see what happens; because in the end that friend will be your primary. Yours is a primary attachment relationship which means that it is special. It means that there is no other relationship like it at this moment in time. And because of that it operates under certain rules. The rules are that the two of you depend on each other for the air you breathe, for the wellness you feel, for the energy you get and you keep looking outside for it and the relationship is dying on the vine because of that."

So the therapist's understanding of what is going on or what this about is going to correct where they're looking at

because you're pointing them to something where they can actually get something, finally. Neither can get that from you, the therapist. It's not possible. But it is from the two of them.

Now is it possible that they can actually follow through on this and do it well enough where they'll be happy together? The answer is it's not important. It's not important because it will be what it will be and you, as therapist, cannot and should not control the outcome. It is not up to you whether or not a couple should or should not be together. What should matter to you, the therapist, is the fact that you have a Petri dish that is a primary attachment relationship with which to work. This makes

for a mutual and individual growth opportunity that far outpaces individual therapist. Partners will become more complex; they will be fighting about things that are more accurate; they'll be asking for things that are more accurate; and they'll be complaining about things that are more doable and repairable. For right now it's a mess. Because they just don't get it. They don't get that they are in a primary attachment relationship and that, by definition, can be Heaven or Hell. The good news is that they have an opportunity to fix the past together. They cannot do that with anyone else as effectively. They can fix it they just need to learn how to do it. They're bad at it. Why? They're bad at it because nobody was good at doing it with them. When you start to reframe things in terms of they're not sick,

they're not lost causes, and they just don't get it. They never understood because there wasn't anyone to model it for them; they're lost.

You are framing something for them that provides a purpose, a platform, or a stage upon which to act with each other. They don't have that. The sense of purpose and meaning has to come from the therapist. It has to be very clear and coherent, so that it's not even questioned. The therapist's clarity of mind can overpower the couple's doubt. This is very important.

How can you say to your couple that theirs is an attachment relationship? How can you be so certain? "Because we have the research and lots of it and there's a lot of data on this. And

if you want to look it up you should do that because this is very important."

So you are containing them and giving them an ideal that there is a purpose to their struggle together. It doesn't matter why they think they're together. There is a reason they are together and they can actually realize it.

This is creating some kind of hope in the by having an experience that isn't what is anticipated and hasn't been experienced before especially while in a particular state of mind.

The therapist cruelly challenges the following preconceived notions:

The relationship is troubled because partners . . .

1. Are bad at it (unskilled, undisciplined, unaware)
2. They don't know how to do it (co-regulate arousal, repair and make thing right, scratch the right itch, protecting the safety/security system)
3. They don't really know each other (not experts on one another)
4. They don't get it (attachment, repair, two-person systems, mutual regulation, etc).