

## Framework for Practice: Counselling Couples and Families

At RANSW, our couple and family therapists assist individuals, couples and families experiencing relationship distress. Our approach reflects the integration of the following therapeutic frameworks:

1. **Systemic lens:** counsellors understand an individual's problems as arising within social and relationship contexts. Counsellors may intervene to directly change the context, or help people make changes themselves that positively impact their relationships. The systemic lens provides a way of conceptualising repetitive circular patterns of behaviour that many couples and families find themselves enacting. From the systems perspective, changing the system becomes the goal of intervention.
2. **Strength based:** counsellors avoid pathologizing individuals or their relationships by viewing problems as co-existing with strengths and capacities. Counsellors assist their clients to draw on these strengths and capacities in dealing with problems.
3. **Diversity informed:** counsellors themselves represent a range of diverse groups and work with clients from diverse and minority populations. These include Aboriginal clients, people from the LGBTQI communities, non-dominant ethnicities and religions, people with disabilities and others who identify with a minority and/or disadvantaged group. Counsellors recognise that therapy is often a meeting between different cultures takes place and they actively explore how difference and otherness impacts people's identities and lived experience.
4. **Trauma informed:** counsellors are trained to identify how past traumatic experiences impact individuals and their relationships. Many couples have experienced interpersonal trauma in their families of origin and/or in their adult lives. Individuals may be triggered by their interactions with other family members and have difficulty regulating their own emotional responses to others.

5. **Gender informed:** in addition to the diversity informed approach, counsellors assist male and female clients to recognise aspects of socialisation and gendered identity that contribute to problems or conflicts in personal relationships.
6. **Ethical relationships:** our approaches to counselling aim to promote a consideration of ethical principles and values that guide relationships. These principles are underpinned by research into the values that support the capacity of relationships to meet the needs of everyone involved. They include respectful communication and behaviour that elicits trust and provides safety. To this end, our approach to counselling facilitates clear and considerate communication, equality between partners, and fairness in parenting.
7. **Safety:** counsellors facilitate and promote relationships that are safe and free from all forms of abuse and violence. Relationship counselling involves the assessment of coercive control, emotional abuse and violence and the use of methods and interventions that promote safety e.g. separate sessions, referral to men's behaviour change programs and dealing with safety as a priority despite clients presenting other issues.

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