

BETWEEN SESSIONS

Episode 1: Why Couples Therapy Isn't Just Individual Therapy x 2

SUMMARY & KEY TAKEAWAYS

Summary of Content

In this opening episode of *Between Sessions*, Karen Murphy—founder of the Institute of Couples Therapy—shares her personal journey with couples work, and explores the fundamental differences between individual and couples therapy.

Speaking directly to fellow therapists, Karen reflects on the common (and frustrating) misconception that couples therapy is simply individual work with two people in the room. With warmth and candour, she unpacks why that simply isn't the case—and why holding the **relationship as the client** changes everything.

Karen also introduces the core of her integrative model, which draws from differentiation theory, systemic family process, Gestalt, and relational depth. Throughout the episode, she offers both conceptual clarity and grounded clinical reflections, including a touching client story that illustrates the transformative power of competent couples work.

Whether you're already working with couples or just beginning to consider it, this video offers a thought-provoking, reflective pause—something to hold between sessions.

Key Takeaways for Therapists

1. **Couples therapy is not individual therapy with two people**

It's a fundamentally different frame. In individual therapy, we work intrapersonally. In couples work, we attend to the **interpersonal system** — the relational process between two people.

2. **The relationship is the client**

This can feel abstract at first, but it's central. Couples therapy requires seeing the relationship as the focus — not either individual. This shift changes our stance, our goals, and our interventions.

3. **Real-time dynamics emerge in the room**

Unlike individual work, couples sessions often reveal the dynamics as they're happening. This gives therapists a live opportunity to observe patterns, co-regulation, and rupture/repair in action.

4. **Neutrality is essential — and challenging**

Holding a neutral stance, especially when one partner's behaviour appears more overtly “problematic,” is one of the most difficult parts of couples work. Karen shares how a systemic lens helps her stay grounded in that position.

5. **An integrative model matters**

ICT's approach isn't bound to a single modality. Instead, it draws on: Differentiation theory, Systemic family process, Gestalt Relational depth and ethical presence.

This makes the work responsive, flexible, and rooted in clinical rigour.

6. **An integrative model matters**

Karen shares a story of a couple she worked with who, after therapy, made meaningful steps toward creating a strong, connected family. It's a reminder that competent couples work doesn't just support the relationship — it can shape future generations.