



The Roadmap Counseling Strategies that Work for The Emotionally Destructive Marriage

Leslie Vernick

www.leslievernick.com

www.leslievernick.com/counselors

Text **EQUIP** to 38470 for additional free resources and to be entered into a drawing for a 30-minute consultation with Leslie.
Must be done by October 1.

Diagnosis Determines Treatment Plan

What's Wrong?

Difficult, Disappointing or Destructive?

Five (5) types of destructive behaviors

1. Reactive abuse
2. Gross imbalance of power and control with an attitude of entitlement

Be careful to discern the difference between unhealthy resistance to control and reactive abuse

Types of Controlling Behavior

Physical, emotional/verbal, sexual, financial, spiritual

3. Chronic deceit
4. Chronic dependency

5. Chronic indifference

How Do We Respond Biblically to an Emotionally Destructive Marriage? Romans 12:21 Do not be overcome by evil but overcome evil with good.

It is good to protect yourself from violent people. Proverbs 27:12

It is good to expose deeds done in darkness. Ephesians 5:11

It is good to speak the truth in love. Ephesians 4:25

It is good to stop someone from sinning against you when possible. Matthew 18:15-18; James 5:19-20; Proverbs 19:19

It is good for someone to experience the consequences of his /her behavior. Galatians 6:7

It is good to see the fruits of repentance before reconciling. Genesis 42-45

It is good to be gracious to your enemy. Romans 12:20

Biblical Picture of a Godly, Healthy Marriage

Mutuality: Mutual caring, mutual honesty, mutual respect, mutual responsibility and mutual repentance

Reciprocity: A healthy relationship is one in which both partners give and both receive. There is safe and open exchange of thoughts and ideas and all perspectives are valued.

Freedom: There is also the freedom to respectfully challenge and disagree with one another without fear of retaliation or danger.

What to Listen For

Imbalance of power and control in the relationship

Consistent lack of mutuality.

Lack of freedom to speak up, have an opinion that is different, disagree, or make choices on his/her own.

Consistent indifference to his/her partners needs, feelings, desires, thoughts.

Blame-shifting, minimizing, and lack of responsibility for wrongs committed in the marriage.

An attitude of entitlement.

Helpful Questions to Ask (when, where, why)

1. Have you ever been threatened or physically hurt in this relationship?
2. Have you ever been an unwilling participant in a sexual act?
3. Have you ever felt fearful around your partner?
4. Are there times you don't trust your partner's honesty?
5. Do you have the freedom to make decisions, give your input and say no to things?
6. Can you respectfully challenge and confront the attitudes, decisions and behaviors of your partner?

If Yes, Dig Deeper

1. When was the first time?
2. When was the last time?
3. What is a typical time?
4. What was the worst time?

Look for imbalance of power and control as well as patterns of abusive/destructive behaviors often escalating in frequency and intensity over time.

The Impact of a Destructive Marriage

Physical, emotional, mental, relational, spiritual and generational. Sin is not just personal, it's interpersonal and generational

Strategies for Healing a Destructive Marriage (Four Stages)

Let's not encourage superficial peacekeeping or misrepresent the biblical picture of marriage in our treatment plan (Jeremiah 6:14)

True peace is not the absence of conflict but the presence of justice.

Martin Luther King

STAGE 1 SAFETY "The prudent see danger and take refuge." Proverbs 27:12

Goal: Help the individual and/or couple stop the abusive and destructive patterns from continuing. Assess for danger

For Her: Validate her biblical right to safety. Help her develop a safety plan (separately).

Resources for Developing a Safety Plan
<http://www.focusministries1.org/help/safety-plan>

www.theraveproject.com/index.php/resources/resource_content/personalized_safety_plan

D – Divorce or separation
A – Alcohol or drug use
N – Narcissistic Tendencies
G – Guns and weapons available
E – Emotionally unstable (previous history)
R – Rebellious, unwilling to be accountable or receive help
O – Other violent behaviors in the past
U – Unpredictable Dr. Jekyll/Mr. Hyde
S – Suicide or homicidal threats

For Him: Assess: Is he willing to be accountable, willing to submit to an authority other than himself, willing to learn self-control, and accept the consequences for failure to comply? If not, he's not ready for counseling. You can help him get ready for counseling, but don't let him steer the treatment, you must steer the treatment.

His internal controls are not operative. He needs external controls.

Commitment to partner: Is he capable of doing these things? If not, then these become the initial treatment goals.

- Time out's
- Respecting stated boundaries
- Identifying trigger points and developing a safety plan
- Giving his partner the freedom to say no without bullying or badgering her?
- Tolerating his own and her negative emotions without resorting to abuse.

Important not to negotiate safety, may need to be tough.

If he is unable to respect boundaries or limitations, or keep to time outs, then safety cannot be maintained and marital counseling is contraindicated.

When is Separation Warranted? (Download additional handout for biblical supports for separation at www.leslievernick.com/freegift)

1. When there is a lack of safety (physically, emotionally, spiritually, sexually and/or financially).
2. When all else has been tried to bring the destructive partner to awareness and repentance.

Jesus values safety: Rahab and the spies, David and Saul, Joseph and Herod.

Separation is a consequence of a hard and unrepentant heart: “Your own conduct and actions have brought this upon you. This is your punishment. How bitter it is. How it pierces to the heart. Jeremiah 4:18

Pain can be instructive – if you let it be.

Ground rules for separation: Discussions need to be made in the presence of a mediator or witness on boundaries, finances, visitation of children, phone calls, texts (frequency), who lives where. It is unrealistic to define a set amount of time for the separation because it much of it depends the abuser’s willingness to take appropriate steps and his faithfulness in walking them through (safety and sanity steps are crucial).

What Makes Marriages Unable to Heal?

Blindness, not brokenness

Unwillingness to see Unwillingness to confess. Unwillingness to get help. Moses and Jesus called it “hardness of heart” Wrong theology (thinking)

Unconditional love does not mean unconditional relationship (Isaiah 59:2-5)

Marriage is a covenant relationship but it’s not an unconditional covenant made only by one person, but a covenant based on promises made by both parties. When one person repeatedly breaks the covenant promises – to love, honor, protect and be faithful, what happens to the covenant?

When is Marital Counseling NOT Appropriate?

1. When there is no safety. One person cannot speak honestly about what’s going on.
2. When there is a lot of insanity (wrong unbiblical thinking) that needs to be worked through and changed. Usually better accomplished in individual or group work.
3. When you only have one *client* even with two people in the office.

Indicators that someone in your office is not a client.

Consistent resistance to your counsel.
Blameshifting, denial, and excuse making
Lack of personal goals. Why are you here?
Lack of follow through. Not doing homework.

Why wouldn’t you still work with the willing person?

Gives her false hope that if she does her part, he will do his part.
Gives him the impression that you agree with him that she is the problem.
Gives him ammunition to use to harm her later

4. When you as the counselor cannot or should not stay neutral.

STAGE TWO SANITY “When your eye is good, your whole body is filled with light. But when your eye is bad, your whole body is filled with darkness. And if the light you think you have is actually darkness, how deep that darkness is.” Matthew 6:23

Goal: Help both individuals (usually separately) identify the lies they’ve believed that have kept the destructive patterns going in their marriage.

Common faulty beliefs in destructive Individuals:

It’s not my fault I act that way.
She’s overreacting
It’s her fault, if she would only do what I say...this wouldn’t happen
I’m the head of the house, therefore I always get my way.
My money is my money. She is not an equal partner.
If she respects me, she won’t disagree or challenge my decisions.
I’m entitled to sex, no matter what. She’s my wife (object to use rather than person to love)
If I get hurt, then she deserves to get hurt back.
Forgiving means forgetting and never bringing it up again.
If I said I’m sorry, then everything should be better.
If she doesn’t know, it won’t hurt her or our marriage (porn, adultery, financial deceit, emotional affairs).
If I don’t hit her, then she’s not abused.

Common faulty beliefs for who allow themselves to be mistreated.

I must be doing something wrong, it’s my fault
If only I try harder, he will change.
God wants me to stay no matter what.
If I leave, God will punish me.
It’s better for the children for us to be together as a family no matter what.
I can’t live alone (or without this person).
If only I could get through to him, he would be a great person.
He needs my help.
No one else would want me.
I don’t deserve to be treated any better.
There must be something wrong with me that he would treat me this way, especially when he treats everyone else great.
This is normal, I don’t know any different.

No healing can take place until both individuals are willing to look at themselves, renew their mind with God’s truth and see the things that they think and believe that contribute to their destructive relationship.

Common faulty beliefs of people helpers

God hates divorce more than anything else he hates, therefore, stay together at all costs.

Suffering is a virtue, therefore, if you are suffering in your marriage – suffer well and be an example of Christ to your husband.

As Christians we have no rights, therefore to speak up and set boundaries on your spouse is unbiblical.

You are both sinners, you are the worst sinner you know – so therefore it's prideful and unbiblical for you to speak about someone else's sin or implement consequences or boundaries on that behavior.

Forgiveness means automatic trust and reconciliation.

You can't work on your marriage if you aren't living together.

For her: Help her see clearly what's going on and what her biblical choices are in order to bring about the best possibility for her safety and a true reconciliation of their marriage. Develop **CORE** strength.

C – I will be **COMMITTED** to truth, no more pretending

O – I will be **OPEN** to the Holy Spirit and wise others to learn new ways of thinking and relating.

R – I will be **RESPONSIBLE** for myself and **RESPECTFUL** towards my abusive spouse without dishonoring myself.

E – I will be **EMPATHETIC** and compassionate without **ENABLING** destructive behaviors to continue.

Teach her how to live from her Big Circle and not her feelings

Help her put her marriage in it's proper place.

Clarify her role as a biblical helpmate and what biblical love does and doesn't do.

Continue helping her use the appropriate language to establish her separate personhood and to invite her partner to see her differently.

For him:

He must learn to see his wife as a person to love, not an object to use and control.

He must begin to see and take responsibility for his own actions and attitudes and stop blaming his wife.

His fantasies must be challenged. For example, "I should be entitled to the perks of a great marriage and loving wife without putting in the work required." Or "If my wife loves and respects me, she will never disagree or challenge my decisions." Or, "It doesn't matter how I treat her, she would be willing to have sex with me whenever I want." Or "If I lose my temper and treat her poorly it's her fault. She interrupted me."

Is he listening? Teachable? Repentant? Is he able to realize that he's wrong. Help him develop empathy and compassion for those he's hurt.

Don't Nullify God's Law of Consequences – Galatians 6:7

Things we're looking to see happening – "Fruits of repentance" Not words but changed actions and attitudes. Luke 3 Proverbs 20:11

1. Accepts full responsibility for actions and attitudes – no blaming
2. Recognizes effects of actions on others and shows empathy for the pain he/she has caused.
3. Accepts consequences without demands or conditions
4. Makes amends for damage
5. Continues to learn and grow in healthy relationship skills
6. Willing to make consistent changes over the long term
7. Consistently accountable

Make Amends rather than expect amnesty.

Five C's of Change

Clarity: He sees clearly that he is part of the problem. No blaming, no minimizing or avoiding responsibility.

Commitment: He is committed to God, his spouse and himself to do what it takes to learn how to be a better man.

Community: He invites trusted others to give him feedback and hold him accountable for the changes he wants to make.

Confession: He is able to articulate the wrongs he has done in his marriage and take responsibility for them.

Consequences: He understands that negative consequences often follow sinful behaviors and does not expect amnesty, instant trust, or restoration of the marriage.

Sanity is reached when they both realize it's NOT acceptable for her to live that way and it's NOT acceptable for him to treat her that way.

Willing but weak (immature, bad habits, poor family history, poor impulse control, PTSD)

Unwilling but capable (look for a history of resentment, bitterness, affair or lack of forgiveness, beliefs of entitlement that makes them unwilling)

Unwilling and incapable without a lot of work (usually personality disordered, NPD, OCPD, BPD)

May sound willing but not fully capable (brain injured, dementia, sociopath, limitations due to chronic illness, ADHD, Bi-Polar, etc.)

Stages 1 and 2 we're looking for a change of heart and an active renewing of their mind.

From Proud to Humble
From Entitled to Grateful
From Willful to Willing.
From Self-centered to God centered
From Fear-filled to Love filled.

Stages 3 and 4 we're looking for a change in habits. In the next two stages we are moving from external controls and developing more internal self-control. We are working the truths they have accepted and learned, into their habits and developing new patterns.

STAGE THREE STABILITY "Prove by the way that you live that you have repented of your sin and turned to God" Luke 3:8

Goal: Living from CORE with one another and their accountability partners.

Develop the internal controls to continue safety and sanity within the marital relationship. Rebuilding marital trust.

We are looking for them to build **NEW HISTORY** and not **REPEAT OLD HISTORY**. When old history rears its ugly head, is he self-aware enough to self-correct? Is he willing to listen to her feedback and self correct? Is he developing self-control.

OLD HISTORY – The abuse cycle – don't confuse the Honeymoon or calm phase with change. Change only happens when the tension building is different and there is no abusive incidents.

What does NEW HISTORY look like?

1. Ability to recognize and own his/her problem (see clearly)
2. Willing to receive feedback from others humbly (Teachable)
3. Respect and care for the personhood of the other (safety and sanity)
4. Willingness to work hard over the long term. (creates stability)

Assess where trust is broken. Safety, honesty, compassionate care, reliability, financial security and stability

Rebuilding Trust: (4 primary areas)

Authenticity: She doesn't see him one way at home and another way elsewhere.

Reliability: He keeps his word. If he says he will do it, he does it. If he says he won't do it, he doesn't do it. She can count on what he says. He is faithful to his word. If he forgets something, he takes responsibility for it and makes amends. If he messes up, he is quick to apologize and ask forgiveness.

Competence: He will continue to put himself around men who know how to do what he needs to learn. He is humble enough to admit he's not known how to be a godly man and desires to learn.

Care: She sees consistent actions that demonstrate care and concern for her well-being, financial security and physical and emotional safety. This is not to be confused with superficial charming and grandstanding behaviors like putting his arm around her in church while ignoring her for days at home, or bring her flowers in front of the kids but screaming at her in the bedroom.

For her

Let go of resentments and fears (takes time, sometimes a long time)
Build new trust (takes time and repeated successes to cement new trust)
Continue CORE work

For him

Continued accountability to outside people for changes to be made, sins to be confessed and amends to be made
Developing genuine compassion and empathy for his spouse
Learning and practicing new ways of relating – CORE Strength for him too.
Ability to hear and respond positively to feedback with self reflection and changed behaviors

Necessary changes for a destructive person: Seven Dips of Healing from 2 Kings 5

1. He needs to learn how to submit to others instead of always demanding one's own way. This involves giving up control, putting him/herself under another's authority – the group, the church, the counselor, the law.
2. He needs new skills in problem solving. He has used power and control, manipulation and/ or deceit as the way to solve problems. Now he must learn new ways of making decisions like compromise, sharing power, cooperation and mutual submission.
3. He needs to learn how to appropriately express feelings without abuse, intimidation or manipulation.
4. He needs to learn to allow his partner to be separate and say no, disagree and differ with him without labeling it disrespectful, getting enraged, or feeling terrified of abandonment.
5. He needs to learn how to speak directly about what he needs and to trust others are there and care.
6. He must learn how to handle the hurt and disappointment that inherently comes when people who care for us fail and let us down. He must learn to rest in God's love because human love is never enough.

7. He needs to trust God to meet his needs as well as learn to take the initiative and responsibility to meet his own needs rather than demanding that another person always do so.

Practice + Patience = Healing

STAGE FOUR SECURITY “She (he) brings him (her) good not harm all the days of her life.” Proverbs 31:12

Goal: To deepen intimacy as trust is established. To work on communication skills, conflict resolution skills, problem solving skills, emotional intimacy and continued practice of new habits.

Living in a new mindset (renewing the mind Romans 12:2) takes consistency and building a track record of honoring, respecting, truthfulness, mutual responsibility and repentance.

Over time as the couple move through these stages, destructive patterns become less and less and a security develops in the relationship that foster a forward and hopeful stance for true reconciliation, healing, and peace.

Common Mistakes People Helpers Make in working with marital abuse

1. Wrong Diagnosis/wrong Treatment Plan
2. Doing Marriage Counseling When Not Appropriate
3. Nullifying God’s law of Consequences and Pushing for Premature Reconciliation before the couple is ready to build new history consistently.

Leslie’s Books and DVD’s will be at BOOTH #329

FREE RESOURCES by Leslie Vernick

Free E Book by Leslie Vernick: The Art of Asking Good Questions Text EQUIP to 38470

Free Report on The Biblical Guidelines for Separation Text EQUIP to 38470

Do this before October 1 to be entered into a drawing for a 30-minute consultation with me to discuss career goals, case consultation or a personal problem.

NEW Website for counselors, pastors, people helpers

AT: www.leslievernick.com/counselors

There are free articles and short video's on this website for counselors, people helpers, Church leaders and pastors that will help EQUIP you to better serve those in destructive relationships

For Additional Training to Wisely Help People Stuck in Destructive Relationships

EQUIP is a monthly membership group led by Leslie Vernick and Chris Moles (Senior Pastor, Batterer Intervention Specialist and author of The Heart of Domestic Abuse) for pastors, counselors and lay leaders who work with individuals and couples in destructive marriages. For more information go to: www.leslievernick.com/equipsignup

Educational Resources

www.leslievernick.com/the-emotionally-destructive-marriage: Free resource page with video clips, podcasts, and articles.

<http://www.leslievernick.com/blog/> Each week I write a blog regarding destructive relationships and marriages. Great community interaction.

God's Protection of Women: When Abuse is Worse than Divorce (Grand Rapids, MI: RBC Ministries, 2005), free to download, <http://web001.rbc.org/pdf/discovery-series/gods-protection-of-women.pdf>

The Rave Project www.theraveproject.com

FOCUS Ministries, Inc www.focusministries1.org

Support Resources

National Domestic Violence Hotline 800-799-7233 or 800-787- 3224 (TDD). Staffed 24 hours a day, 365 days a year

Family Renewal Shelter 24 hour crisis line 253-475-9010. National crisis line 888-550-3915. This is a Christian resource that provides help developing a safety plan and crisis help

Women's Law (womenslaw.org) State by state legal information and resources as well as information on how to gather evidence of abuse and prepare for court

Vine (vinelink.com) Available in 47 states allowing victims to search for an offender in custody by name or ID number and then register to be alerted if offender has been released or escaped.

Recommended Books

A Cry For Justice by Jeff Crippen and Anna Wood

Character Disturbance: The Phenomenon of Our Age George K Simon Jr. Ph.D

How to Act Right When Your Spouse Acts Wrong by Leslie Vernick

Is it my Fault by Justin and Lindsey Holcomb

Not Under Bondage by Barbara Roberts

The Heart of Domestic Abuse: Gospel Solutions for Men who Use Control and Violence in the Home by Chris Moles

The Emotionally Destructive Marriage by Leslie Vernick

The Emotionally Destructive Relationship by Leslie Vernick

Why Does He Do That: Inside The Minds of Angry and Controlling Men by Lundy Bancroft

