

Counseling to Get You Unstuck

Five Decades of Social Work, Therapy Practice Inform Dottie Miller's Techniques

Dottie Miller
LCSW, LMFT, LPC

Dottie earned a Bachelor's Degree from Northwestern University in 1966, and a Master's Degree in Social Work from New York University in 1968. She is certified and licensed in counseling, clinical social work and marriage and family therapy, as well as a Transactional Analysis Practitioner and Board Certified by the American Board of Examiners in Clinical Social Work. A trained Collaborative Divorce Mental Health Professional, she has served as secretary and board director of San Antonio's Collaborative Divorce group. Dottie has been married for more than 50 years, with three grown children and five grandchildren. Dottie opened her private practice in 1985. She continues to see patients now via electronic platforms.



Written by, Amy Morgan

“Counseling to get you unstuck,” is a descriptive phrase Dottie Miller, LCSW, LMFT, LPC, BCD, uses to describe her psychotherapy practice. That motto could also be a hallmark of Discernment Counseling, one of the therapies in which Dottie has been trained. Discernment Counseling helps couples considering divorce come to a clear, confident decision about whether to pursue reconciliation or move toward ending their marriage.

Discernment Counseling requires only a short-term commitment – fewer than five sessions. It is useful as a guideline to direct conversation when one spouse is “leaning out” and another “leaning in” to the relationship. Discernment Counseling differs from couples therapy, which is designed to help spouses bond. Discernment Counseling helps each individual unravel their story and decide whether relationship problems are insurmountable or warrant further effort.

Dottie finds great satisfaction helping those who decide to continue with counseling overcome communication problems and emotional difficulties, whether individually or together. She uses the Transactional Analysis (TA) method to frame counseling sessions. She describes the modality as “a way of examining and altering the patterns of communication we have with others and within ourselves.”

Transactional Analysis is easy to learn and apply to relationships. Dottie's goal is for patients to tangibly change in a short amount of time, see real results of better communication in their relationships and reap the benefits of an improved perspective long after their work together has concluded.

Three more phrases from Dottie's website, www.dottiemillerpsychotherapy.com, sum up her philosophy and provide potential patients a clue to her active therapy style.

We own our own feelings
We can decide to change negative self-talk
We can learn to communicate effectively

Dottie looks for and builds upon a relationship's positives – a practice she learned as a clinical social worker. Her optimistic attitude informs her philosophy of the value of marriage — her default position is to help a client save their marriage, if possible. She has seen many couples in crisis through her work as a mental health professional in San Antonio's Collaborative Divorce process.

“I'm very pro-marriage, especially after children,” she said. Dottie attempts to get a “commitment to dig in and find the little spark in the ashes to get the fire going again.”

“People don't realize the damage they do to their kids,” she said. “Unless one of the parents is not functioning — substance abuse or otherwise abusive, or uncontrollably angry — people grow up better in a household with both parents. Lots of my patients are products of divorce. I've always wondered how it would have been if their parents had stuck it out.”

Dottie was introduced to TA therapy in 1985 through her work at the Family Service Association. Its practical application and clear structure appealed to her desire to help clients make a results-oriented, positive, lasting change in thinking and behavior. People aren't stuck with living life based on decisions that don't fit anymore, decisions made in childhood that made good sense from a child's perspective and/or in their family. In therapy, we can revisit such decisions and re-decide to think, feel, and act differently, she said. Re-Decision Therapy produces profound changes. “It works, it makes sense, and it's not psychobabble,” she enthused.

Dottie especially enjoys the ability to use TA to facilitate conversations and work through conflict in a positive way. Dottie is so convinced of TA's effectiveness, she conducted her own outcomes research study, contacting a decade of past patients who had completed therapy at least a year

previous. She found most respondents told her the results had held up over time, which she finds very rewarding. "It's beautiful to witness people's growth," Dottie said. "Growth is never finished as long as we are breathing."

Having accrued more than 50 years of expertise in the field of psychotherapy, she recently was awarded the Albert Nelson Marquis Lifetime Achievement Award by Marquis Who's Who, the world's premier publisher of biographical profiles. Her profile is on her website, www.dottiemillerpsychotherapy.com.

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