

CO5600 COUPLES AND FAMILY COUNSELING 1

Reformed Theological Seminary

Spring 2026

3 Credit Hours

Instructor:

Mike Hillerman, PhD, LPC-S

Class Meeting Dates and Time

Wednesday

1:00 PM – 4:00 PM

Contact Information

Cell:

mhillerman@rts.edu

Office Hours

Upon Request; open door policy

Course Description

This course provides a broad understanding of marriage and family theories and approaches to counseling with families and couples. A variety of approaches will be considered and compared, with the particular focus depending on professor preferences.

Course Objectives (Knowledge and Skill Outcomes) (5.C.1.b Theories and models relevant to counseling). Students will demonstrate:

- CO1** *Couples as a system.* Understanding of the role of couples as systems in themselves and subsystems of families. (CACREP 2.F.3.f; 2.F.5.b; 5.C.1.b).
- CO2** *Evidence based therapies.* A broad understanding of evidenced-based couples therapies with particular emphasis on Emotion Focused Couples Therapy (EFCT). (CACREP 2.F.3.f; 2.F.5.b; 5.C.1.b).
- CO3** *Skills.* Initial skills needed to conduct couple therapy. (CACREP 2.F.3.f; 2.F.5.b).

Methods of Instruction

This course will be taught in the following format: in person lecture instruction, videos, and in-class & out-of-class skills rehearsals.

Assignments (Student Performance Evaluation Criteria)**A1. Classroom participation and required readings. (25%)**

- a) Absence from a class without prior excuse will result in grade reduction. All students are expected to be active, engaged participants.
- b) Students are not permitted to use technology devices (laptops, phone, tablets, watches, etc.) for purposes unrelated to the course. If you witness the use of technology devices for non-course purposes during class time you should report this behavior to the instructor.
- c) You are not to engage in electronic group discussions during class time (e.g. group text messaging, social media messaging, GroupMe style apps). All discussions happening in class need to be accessible to all classroom participants (including the professor).

- d) Completion of required readings or assignments is required before class. Students will be required to document the percentage of reading they completed prior to each class via a quiz on Canvas and be prepared to answer questions related to class readings posed by instructor and peers. Note: you are to estimate the amount of reading you have completed *prior* to class, not the amount you plan to read later.

A2. Conduct four EFT-C role-play sessions. (50%)

1. These role-play exercises will be conducted ***in-person in the Counseling Center at RTS facility. Each session must be recorded.***
2. Counseling students will be assigned to groups of four for this role-play exercise. Within each group of four, two students will be paired. Students will remain in the group and as a pair through the entirety of the role-plays. *Divinity and Theology students will be pair together when possible.*
3. Within each group, each pair will rotate between the roles of: (a) co-counselors, and (b) the couple being counseled.
4. Couple's role: In the couple role the paired students will role-play as if they are in a relationship with each other.
 - a. Each pair must conduct a peer review with the second-year students that they have been assigned to enter the clinic with. The peer review must focus on one or more couples the second-year students are working with (or have worked with previously). Video of session(s) with the couple(s) should be reviewed.
 - b. Each pair should then meet prior to the role-plays to determine the history of the couple they will be role-playing, their roles and interactive patterns, and the situation that brings them to a couples counseling. The patterns and themes in their relationship will be carried through the four role-play sessions.
5. Co-counselor's role: As co-counselors both students are expected to participate in leading the counseling role-play. They will conduct four, 30-minute role-plays of a couples counseling session using the Emotionally Focused Couples Counseling steps. Each role-play round is to be completed per the course schedule. Students will record their completion of each round of role-play in Canvas.
 - a. Role-play Topics

Round 1

The first pair of counselors will utilize skills from steps 1 & 2

The second pair of counselors will utilize skills from steps 1 & 2

Round 2

The first pair of counselors will utilize skills from steps 3 & 4

The second pair of counselors will utilize skills from steps 3 & 4

Round 3

The first pair of counselors will utilize skills from steps 5 & 6

The second pair of counselors will utilize skills from steps 5 & 6

Round 4

The first pair of counselors will utilize skills from steps 7 & 8

The second pair of counselors will utilize skills from steps 7 & 8

- b. Role-play Feedback. Students will receive feedback on their role-play as co-counselors after each round per the course schedule. Each round of review will watch the full 30 minutes of video from the role-play. Students will record in canvas their completion of each round of review.

After Round 1

Pair will conduct a peer review with the second-year students they have been assigned to enter clinic with. The peer review will focus on watching the video of the role-play and second year students providing feedback on the counselor and co-counselor's active listening and joining skills.

After Round 2

Each student will independently review video of their role-play session with a member of the class who is not part of your role-play. Both students are to watch the recorded video of the round-two role-play and discuss strengths and weaknesses of the counselor and co-counselor in role play relative to how steps 3 & 4 are described in class and in course readings.

After Round 3

Pair will conduct a peer review amongst themselves. The peer review will focus on watching the video of the role-play and students providing each other feedback.

After Round 4

Pair will conduct a peer review with the students that role-played the "couple." The peer review will focus on watching the video of the last role-play, and the "couple" students will provide feedback on the overall set of role-play sessions.

Notes:

- i) The specifics of this assignment may be altered based on the number of students in the class.
- ii) Recordings of roles plays may be shown in class to facilitate class discussion and to provide feedback.

A3. Final examination. (25%) A final examination will be given in-class during finals week covering the primary textbooks of this course.

A4. Course Evaluation (0% of grade but required for course completion)

Course evaluations are crucial for assessing and improving the MAC program. Therefore, each MAC course includes an assignment to complete an anonymous online course evaluation. You will verify

whether you have completed the evaluation through a Canvas quiz. This will not count toward your grade but is necessary for successful completion of the course.

Required Course Materials (Texts, Readings, and Videos)

- M1.** Johnson, S. M. (2020). *The practice of emotionally focused couple therapy: Creating connection* (3rd ed.). Routledge. ISBN-13: [978-0815348016](#)
- M2.** Salgado, J., Cunha, C., & Monteiro, M. (2019). Emotion Focused-Therapy for Depression. In L. S. Greenberg & R. Goldman (Eds.), *Clinical Handbook of Emotion-Focused Therapy* (pp. 293-314). Washington, DC: APA. Access here: [Salgado, J., Cunha, C., & Monteiro, M. \(2019\). Emotion Focused-Therapy for Depression.pdf](#)
- M3.** Keller, T., & Keller K. (2011). *The meaning of marriage: Facing the complexities of commitment with the wisdom of God*. Dutton. ISBN: [978-0525952473](#)
- M4.** Atkinson, B. J. (2005). *Emotional intelligence in couples therapy*. W. W. Norton. (ONLY chapters 1–4.) *Available on Canvas.
- M5.** Carder, D. (2017). *The anatomy of an affair: How affairs, attractions and addictions develop, and how to guard your marriage against them*. Moody. ONLY chapter 1. *Available on Canvas.
- M6.** Frame, J. M. (2008). The seventh commandment: Divorce and remarriage. In J. M. Frame, *The doctrine of the Christian life* (pp. 769-781). P & R. *Available on Canvas.
- M7.** Smullens, S. (2002). The 5 cycles of emotional abuse: Investigating a malignant victimization. *Annals of the American Psychotherapy Association*. Sept./Oct. 16-17. Available online at: https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.naswma.org/resource/resmgr/imported/FCE_emotionalAbuse.pdf
- M8.** PCA Ad Interim Committee (1992) *The General Assembly's Report on Divorce and Remarriage*. PCA Historical Center. Available at: https://www.pcahistory.org/pca/ga/20th_pcaga_1992_Appendix_O_Divorce_and_Remarriage_complete.pdf
- M9.** Meneses. (2017). Emotion-focused couples therapy. *Person-Centered & Experiential Psychotherapies*, 16:3, 236-255, DOI:10.1080/14779757.2017.1330706. Available on Canvas.

Optional Reading

- Allender, D. B., & Longman, T. (1999). *Intimate allies: Rediscovering God's design for marriage and becoming soul mates for life*. Tyndale House.
- Brubacher, L. L. (2018). *Stepping into Emotionally Focused Couples Therapy: Key ingredients to change*. Routledge. ISBN: 978-1782203254
- Bradley, B. and Furrow, J. (2013). *Emotionally focused couple therapy for dummies*. Wiley Canada.
- Smith, K. and Greenberg, L. (2007). Internal multiplicity in emotion-focused psychotherapy, *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 63, 175-186.

PCA Ad Interim Study Committee (2022) *Committee Report on Domestic Abuse and Sexual Assault*. PCA Administrative Committee. Available at: <https://www.pcaac.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/2301-AIC-on-Domestic-Abuse-Updated.pdf>

Young, J., Klosko, J., & Weishaar, M., (2006). *Schema therapy, A practitioner's guide*. Guilford.

Course Process and Schedule (**subject to adjustments!!**)

It is important that you be on time and prepared when class begins. Assignments (reading, podcasts, etc.) must be completed prior to the start of class. Be prepared to share your perspective on each preparatory material as I will be asking you directly at some point in class.

Lecture	Date	Topic	Reading Due	Assignments Due	CACREP Standards
L1	1/28	Course Overview, Introduction to EFT	M1.Johnson (1) M3. Keller (1) M10. Meneses	A1 Reading Quiz	2.F.3.f; 2.F.5.b; 5.C.1.b
L2	2/4	EFT Roadmap Power of Marriage	M1.Johnson (2) M3. Keller (2)	A1 Reading Quiz	2.F.3.f; 2.F.5.b; 5.C.1.b
L3	2/11	Attachment & Couples Essence of Marriage	M1.Johnson (3) M3. Keller (3)	A1 Reading Quiz A2.4 Peer Rev. & Meeting	2.F.3.f; 2.F.5.b; 5.C.1.b
L4	2/18	Assessment & Alliance Mission of Marriage	M1.Johnson (4) M3. Keller (4)	A1 Reading Quiz	2.F.3.f; 2.F.5.b; 5.C.1.b
L5	2/25	De-escalation Loving the Stranger	M1.Johnson (5) M3. Keller (5)	A1 Reading Quiz A2.5.a Role Play 1	2.F.3.f; 2.F.5.b; 5.C.1.b
L6	3/4	Re-engaging withdrawer Embracing the Other	M1.Johnson (6) M3. Keller (6)	A1 Reading Quiz A2.5.b Feedback 1	2.F.3.f; 2.F.5.b; 5.C.1.b
	3/11	Spring Break			
L7	3/18	Softening blamers Singleness & Marriage	M1.Johnson (7) M3. Keller (7)	A1 Reading Quiz A2.5 Role Play 2	2.F.3.f; 2.F.5.b; 5.C.1.b
L8	3/25	Consolidating Bonds Sex and Marriage	M1.Johnson (8) M3. Keller (8)	A1 Reading Quiz A2.5.b Feedback 2	2.F.3.f; 2.F.5.b; 5.C.1.b
L9	4/1	Integration Decision Making & Roles	M1.Johnson (9) M3. Keller (Epi., Apndx)	A1 Reading Quiz A2.5 Role Play 3	2.F.3.f; 2.F.5.b; 5.C.1.b

L10	4/8	Addictive Processes EFT for Depression	M1.Johnson (10) M2. Salgado	A1 Reading Quiz A2.5.b Feedback 3	2.F.3.f; 2.F.5.b; 5.C.1.b
L11	4/15	Affairs, Forgiveness & Reconciliation	M1.Johnson (11) M5. Carder M7. Smullens	A1 Reading Quiz A2.5 Role Play 4	2.F.3.f; 2.F.5.b; 5.C.1.b
L12	4/22	Divorce & Remarriage	M6. Frame M8. PCA Divorce (this is long!)	A1 Reading Quiz A2.5.b Feedback 4	
L13	4/29	Abuse, Violence, Safety	M1.Johnson (13) M7. Smullens		2.F.3.f; 2.F.5.b; 5.C.1.b
L14	TBD			A3. Final A4. Course Eval	2.F.3.f; 2.F.5.b; 5.C.1.b

Policies and Important Information

Written Work Format. All written work must conform to current American Psychological Association (APA) style unless otherwise specified. If a student does not have a copy of the APA manual, one should be purchased, or students may use one of the many APA style websites available online, for example: https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/apa_style/apa_style_introduction.html.

Assessment will include how well students represent their thoughts on paper, craftsmanship in writing, and organization of all written work.

Disability Accommodation Policy. If you have a documented disability (physical, psychological, learning, or other disability which affects your academic performance) and would like to receive academic accommodations, please inform your instructor prior to the start of this course. You must provide a letter from the Dean of Students that verifies your disabled status. The instructor and student will discuss the available accommodations for the course. If the student with a disability does not disclose that s/he has a disability, then the student is agreeing to take full responsibility for any related consequences that may occur.

Access to Research Database. RTS provides MAC students with access to the Ebscohost Psychology & Behavioral Science Collection of full text journal articles. You can access this collection from computers in the library, or from your home computer by following the link below and logging in with a username and password to be provided in class.

<http://search.ebscohost.com/>

Use of Artificial Intelligence. You may not submit any work generated by an AI program as your own. You may use AI programs (e.g. ChatGPT) to help generate ideas and brainstorm. However, be aware that the material generated by these programs may be inaccurate, incomplete, or otherwise problematic. If you include material generated by an AI program, it should be cited like any other reference material (with due consideration for the quality of the reference, which may be poor). Any plagiarism or other form of cheating will be dealt with severely under relevant RTS policies. Of course, there are many cases where I may not be able to tell if you cheated or not. Note however that, for any reason, including doubts about whether the paper was written with external help, any student can be required to come in for an oral examination on their paper. In such a case, a grade for the oral examination will replace that for the paper.

Submission of work. All assignments should be submitted on the Canvas course webpage.

Late work. All assignments are due as scheduled regardless of attendance unless prior arrangements are made with the instructor. Assignments turned in late will be deducted 1/3 letter grade for each late day.

Return of work. All work will be returned to students via Canvas. Additionally, if students would like additional feedback, they may set up time before or after class to meet with the professor.

Grading Scale

A (97-100)	B- (86-87)	D+ (75-77)
A- (94-96)	C+ (83-85)	D (72-74)
B+ (91-93)	C (80-82)	D- (70-71)
B (88-90)	C- (78-79)	F (Below 70)

Attendance Policy. Regular attendance is expected and required. Excessive absences (more than 2 class meetings) will result in the loss of points equal to one letter grade per absence. If serious illness or an emergency prevents a student from attending any class, please notify the instructor before the class begins. It is the responsibility of the student to obtain any materials handed out or presented during the missed class from a classmate.

Class Participation. Students are expected to participate in all components of the class. Each student is expected to read all the assigned materials in advance for each class and have prepared written comments and questions for class discussion. Contributions should reflect knowledge of the reading assignments or other sources.

Student Learning Outcome Table

The table below shows how the objectives of this course will be met, and how they relate to CACREP Standards. Details about specific course objectives, assignments, and evaluation methods can be found in later sections of this syllabus.

CACREP Standard	Course Objective	Material(s)*	Assignment(s)	Lecture(s)
2.F.3.f;	CO1. Couples as a system. CO2. Evidence based therapies. CO3. Skills.	M1. Brubacker M2. Johnson M4. Atkinson M5. Carder M7. Smullens	A1. Participation A2. EFCT Role-play Sessions A3 Final Exam	L1 – L13
2.F.5.b;	CO1. Couples as a system. CO2. Evidence based therapies. CO3. Skills.	M1. Brubacker M2. Johnson M4. Atkinson M5. Carder M7. Smullens	A1. Participation A2. EFCT Role-play Sessions A3 Final Exam	L1 – L13
5.C.1.b	CO1. Couples as a system. CO2. Evidence based therapies.	M1. Brubacker M2. Johnson M4. Atkinson M5. Carder M7. Smullens	A1. Participation A2. EFCT Role-play Sessions A3 Final Exam	L1 – L13

Course Objectives Related to MAC* Student Learning Outcomes

Course: CO5600 Couples and Family Counseling 2

Professor: Michael Hillerman, Ph.D.

Campus: Jackson

Date: Spring 2026

MAC* Student Learning Outcomes <i>In order to measure the success of the MAC curriculum, RTS has defined the following as the intended outcomes of the student learning process. Each course contributes to these overall outcomes. This rubric shows the contribution of this course to the MAC outcomes.</i>		Rubric <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong • Moderate • Minimal • None 	Mini-Justification
Professional Counseling Orientation & Ethical Practice	Understands and applies the basic knowledge needed to be an effective counselor including: the history and philosophy of counseling, ethical standards of practice, personal career development, advocacy for clients, consultation & collaboration, and a Reformed, biblical and theological framework for counseling.	Moderate	Students add to their knowledge and practical foundation of effective and ethical counseling work as applied to couples.
Social & Cultural Diversity	Understands and demonstrates how living in a cultural/global society affects clients who are seeking counseling and clinical mental health services, as well as the effects of sin such as racism, discrimination, sexism, and oppression on one's own life and career and those of the client.	Minimal	The course materials are applied to working with diverse couples.
Human Growth & Development	Understands and applies knowledge of various theories of individual and family development, and factors affecting human development. To include biological, neurological, physiological, systemic, and environmental factors, addiction, and effects of crisis, disasters, and traumas.	Moderate	The development and growth of couple relationships over time is explored.
Career Development	Understands and applies theories and models of career development, counseling, and decision making.	None	
Counseling & Helping Relationships	Understands and applies theories and models of counseling, strategies for understanding and practicing consultation, and developing relevant counseling treatment and intervention plans.	Strong	Couples counseling theory is presented in depth and applied in role-play sessions
Group Counseling & Group Work	Understands and applies theories and models of group counseling and group work, dynamics of the group process and development, and therapeutic factors that contribute to group effectiveness.	None	

Assessment & Testing	Understands and applies clinical knowledge effectively, including various models and approaches to clinical evaluation and their appropriate uses. To include diagnostic interviews, mental status examinations, symptom inventories, and psychoeducational and personality assessments, and is sensitive to the complications of diagnosis and interpretation of formal and informal evaluation.	Minimal	Assessment of couples is addressed.
Research & Program Evaluation	Demonstrates the ability to critically evaluate research through a biblical worldview and integrate it into counseling practice. Understands the process of program evaluation and its integration into the practice of counseling and clinical mental health counseling.	Moderate	The research basis of the course material is presented.
Clinical Mental Health Counseling	Demonstrates the knowledge and skills necessary to address a wide variety of circumstances within the context of clinical mental health counseling.	Moderate	Skills for addressing pathologic relational patterns are learned and practiced. Systemic understanding of counseling is presented.
Integration (Biblical/Theological)	Knowledge of and integration of Reformed, biblical and theological concepts with counseling practices.	Strong	The couples counseling theories are examined in light of biblical concepts. Biblical view of marriage, divorce, domestic violence, reconciliation are considered.
Sanctification	Demonstrates a love for the triune God.	Moderate	Student apply course materials to clients and themselves in the EFCT workbook.