

**Jennifer Jackson:** Hello. This is Jennifer Jackson and this is the mind and body podcast series for a caring approach featuring Dr. Carlos Durana and Dr. Durana is a clinical psychologist and a professional counselor and the founder of a caring approach. He has over 30 years of experience in the area of counseling and psychotherapy.

He brings a vast array of experience in a therapeutic approach that he describes as healing. Integrative Counseling and Therapy. Today's topic is Relationship Counseling and Therapy. Please welcome Dr. Durana.

**Dr. Carlos Durana:** Well thank you. I'm so glad to be here with you today.

**Jennifer Jackson:** Well, thanks. It's good to have you. Well, let's get started with this one. You have a huge topic here that everyone can relate to. Can you tell us a little bit about how you got started in this field?

**Dr. Carlos Durana:** Sure. And, and in particular, since the topic today has to do with, uh, relationship therapy and, and counseling. Um, how did I get in this field?

That's a great question. I, uh, my family of origin, what can I say? The experiences that I had growing up. We're very challenging. And this is not to blame my parents. They did what they could. But it was very difficult. There was a lot of, uh, a lot of struggles, uh, economically, but also relationally between my parents and my siblings.

And so there were a lot of fights. There were, there was a lot of tension growing up. And that had an impact. There was a lot of suffering that I saw going on. And that was one of the big draws for me. Certainly I, even as a kid, I had a role of almost like being a little bit of a caretaker or a little bit of a therapist in a way.

And so, you know, there were many instances that were very difficult for me to witness. And so there was this, uh, sense that, uh, later in life in my early twenties in particular, I started to tap into that and working on myself and, and it became clear that I really wanted to help people, uh, help people not suffer so much.

Whether it be individually, in their own personal lives, um, as well as relationally in, in couples, uh, in relationships.

**Jennifer Jackson:** Absolutely. Absolutely. I think one of the important, uh, aspects of being a good therapist is. When you are able to counsel based on experience.

**Dr. Carlos Durana:** And, and I'm not saying this to boast, but I think it's really important to, to have work, to work on yourself and continue to work on yourself because that's really how you can help people from personal experience.

Certainly the clinical experience is important and the book experience is important, but it's, I don't think it's sufficient. You really need to. You need to use your own personal experience and the things you've gone through and worked on and been able to heal so that you can help people and guide people, uh, to better find themselves, to better understand themselves, but also to, um, bring that to their lives in a, in a constructive and healthy way so that they can be more, they can have lives that are more satisfactory.

And in this case, relationships that are better and more satisfactory. understand. Could through

**Jennifer Jackson:** what a therapy session with you would look like?

**Dr. Carlos Durana:** Yeah, sure. Great question. well, first of all, I think that it's really important to create an environment where people, like in this case, a couple, that's what we're talking about right now, relationship therapy.

So that both people feel safe in that environment. They feel that they can talk to one another, uh, in a constructive way.

**Jennifer Jackson:** Okay.

**Dr. Carlos Durana:** and so that they feel that I can be a fair, um, you know, as a coach, if you will, or assistant in their problems, um, that's very important, creating that sense of safety, that sense of fairness in my role with them.

And I take that very seriously. I think without that, it's very difficult to go further in helping people learn skills. They have to have a level of, a beginning level of trust that starts to take place. They can, they can feel, okay, we can trust this guy to help us here. And also we can, we can see that he can be fair to both of us.

You know, and he can be empathetic and understanding. And that's how I see part of my role, one of being supportive and creating this environment, but also the other role that I have is also how to be challenging in a constructive way.

Because if I am just being supportive and if I'm not providing feedback or if I'm not providing skills and so on, that can grow.

Almost like a coach, you know, like you, you know, a coach that can, can help somebody who's doing a sport or something like that and he can say, Hey, you can do this. You can expand into here or there or learn this so that you can go on and improve the relationship. Yeah, I

**Jennifer Jackson:** understand that. So speaking, speaking personally, I understand exactly how important it is, uh, to have that, that safe space where, where couples can, uh, feel free to, um, say what they may not feel the other person wants to hear, or, just the ability to.

Enough courage to say this is what I want or this is what I don't want. Do you find that you have to also counsel separately as well?

**Dr. Carlos Durana:** Great question. Uh, yes I do. In a sense I'm dealing with three. Three entities, we have the couple and we have two individuals and those two individuals have their own personal history that they bring into a relationship and, uh, and that personal history can affect the relationship, the things that they learn, that they model from their parents and, and so on and, uh, their own beliefs and feelings from their own history that can come into the relationship in ways that can affect the relationship in a negative way.

So I have to pay attention to that. Okay. There are things that people will say and in an individual session, uh, that they will not say in front of a partner because they're afraid that it's going to make things worse or sometimes they can be secrets and so on. And so I have to provide that space so that I can learn about them and and, uh, individually.

from their, you know, their personal histories and so on, so that I can help them to see how that comes into their relationship itself and how it can affect their relationship, but also there are things that may, I may need to help them work separately, uh, in the process. So, I will see the couple together first, usually first, and I may do that for a couple of sessions, maybe more, and then I may have, go into Separate sessions just to do that individual part.

The number of individual sessions depends on the nature of the problem but most often than not we're working as a couple.

and, and also because as the couple gets more comfortable and, and addressing issues with one another and they feel safer. They feel like they're learning things, they feel more comfortable in talking to each other.

Then we can go more integrated a depth as a result.

**Jennifer Jackson:** you say is the most common problem in relationships nowadays?

**Dr. Carlos Durana:** well, uh, I mean there are lots of challenges that take place, but in terms of things that are most problematic in a relationship can be sometimes issues of criticisms, negative criticisms that can impact the relationship in a negative way.

We all need to give feedback to each other, but how we do that is really important. Another, another main concern has to do with, um, sometimes the distancing that takes place between people. And that can also be very problematic because as you do that, um, we're pulling away from each other. We'll take less interest in one another.

We're less curious about one another. And so that's also another very important concern.

**Jennifer Jackson:** So what I'm hearing then is, uh, your therapy is not one size fits all then.

**Dr. Carlos Durana:** then. Right, right. I really have to tailor that. And also the particular approach that I might be using. Uh, sometimes I'm going, I do place a lot of emphasis on teaching people skills.

I think that's a foundation in a sense of the relationship house. Uh, good communication and conflict resolution skills are essential for that. How we talk to each other. Uh, in constructive ways. How do we listen to each other? Uh, that's another very important thing. How do we take responsibility for our role in what the problem is?

That's a big deal. How do we support one another and so on? And so, I am teaching a lot of skills along the way and I'm having people dialogue with each other so that they're using and practicing the skills because otherwise, if they're

just always just talking to me and I'm being a mediator between them, what happens when they walk out of the session?

What happens a year from now? Do they have the tools? That are really important to maintain that relationship. And so I'm a very strong believer in that and in fact many years ago I did research on this in terms of couples, program that was very well known called Pairs and I did the first research, uh, uh, on that program and, and that involved teaching skills basically and the importance of doing that.

So, so we want to establish that foundation, the good skills, uh, uh, in conflict resolution and communication because that allows then. For people to talk to each other in depth, from a heart place, from a good feeling place. They can talk about the deeper needs that are there, the differences in expectations and needs and so on that need to be addressed.

But if we don't have the skills, and we do this in a constructive way, It's very hard to talk about those needs and, and expectations and those kinds of differences because the, the bad communication becomes a side distraction, you know, because they, they go off and then they're talking to each other about the way that they're talking to each other, which is not helpful and so on.

And so we want to, uh, you know, get that out of the way so that then they can. Really talk to each other in depth about their feelings, their needs, and their expectations. Because ultimately, in relationships, it's really about emotions and feelings. And they need to learn how to navigate that and address those things.

Absolutely. Yeah.

**Jennifer Jackson:** Do you find that, um, with the way society is going nowadays, do you find that, uh, relationship counseling or relationship therapy is, uh, becoming more and more popular now based on just events that have gone on over the last past, say, How was the relationship with your parents? and we, and we, um, we spent, um, uh, Uh, five years with COVID and everything else.

**Dr. Carlos Durana:** Well, yeah, yeah, yeah, that's great question.

Yeah, COVID brought out a lot of problems. People being together for long periods of times in ways that they had not done before. And the pressures that were around, you know, the relationship and in different ways, economically

and otherwise. That really opened the door for, uh, for many people to. To do relationship work.

Uh, definitely. Yeah.

Let me, let me say a little something about also a question that you have about how I work and so on. And, um, I mean I think people fundamentally change in, in, in

You can change in three different ways. We can change in terms of how we think about the situation, how I think about my partner, interpretations that I make, beliefs that I have, and so on.

And that's an area where I can change my way of thinking. Right? I can change that way. How I think about things. How I interpret things. And so on. The beliefs about certain things. The expectations that I may have. My ideas about love and intimacy and all of that. And that, I may need to look at those and change them because they may not be adequate enough.

Okay? And we're also two people. We have different sets of expectations and experiences. So there is that level. You see? We can change through, uh, in terms of our thinking and so on. Then we also, we can change in terms of our feelings, our emotions. You know, how do we allow ourselves to experience different feelings and emotions?

Sometimes we repress certain things. Sometimes we overdo certain emotions, certain feelings, you know. We need to learn how to deal with, uh, how do we deal with our anger? How do we deal with our fear? How do we deal with our, you know, our vulnerabilities opening our heart to each other and so on. And so there's that area of feeling and emotion.

Then we have the area of behaviors. How do we behave with one another? Um, and that's extremely important because if I'm talking to you in a way that is, that is combative and so on, uh, that may not be so helpful. If I want to send a message to you, I want to send that message in a way so that it's going to increase the likelihood that you are going to receive it.

And so there's the area of behavior and no matter, this is the other thing about therapy sometimes that we can do therapy and I'm talking about individual therapy because I do that too. And we can, we can have insights. You know, and, and so on. But in the long run, uh, insights about our history, uh, can be helpful, but they may not be enough.

We, because we may still have to deal with beliefs that we have about ourselves. That need to be changed, regardless of the insights as we may have had. And then we need to carry that into a behavior change, otherwise it doesn't stick, you know. If I have some insight about my history in terms of how I learned, um, like I'm thinking even on my own, my own case, how I learned to, um, to distance myself, you know, and to protect myself, you know.

And I understand where that all developed and why. Um, but I still needed to learn to behave differently. So instead of distancing in terms of my attachment style, I needed to challenge myself so that I can learn to not distance so much and come more in, into the relationship in a more intimate way and more vulnerable way.

Because ultimately, as I was saying, relationships are mostly about the heart and feelings and so on. And, um, Vulnerability is a big, it's a big, huge, important thing. And if we cannot do that, we cannot be in a long term, deep, quality relationship. It comes down to that. And so, uh, we have to put whatever we're learning into practice.

And every time when people come, I say, Uh, you know, look, every time you come here, you want to get something out of this when you walk out of here. You might have an insight, you might have something that you've learned, a skill of some kind, or a behavior that you're going to work on because you want to take this and carry it through.

Uh, for the week, so that every time you come, there's going to be some kind of homework. My expectation is that you're going to be working as a couple or as an individual with me in a, in a, in a team fashion, you know, we're working together to help you and, but you have to do your part. See what happens very often is that in relationships, people come into relationship therapy or marital therapy.

And they come to fix the other part,

right? They point the

**Jennifer Jackson:** It's always they point the

**Dr. Carlos Durana:** exactly. They point the finger at each other. And that's one of the things I, I, I right away talk about. I say, are you willing to take responsibility for your role in this? And what are you really willing to do? Are you willing to invest the time and the effort to do this?

If you don't, it, the progress is very slow. And when people ask me, how long does this take? Well, it depends on what you're after. If you want just to learn some skills, it may take five, 10 sessions. If you want to go deeper, then it takes longer. But even, even that much, whatever, whether it's five, 10, 15, 20, you have to be, you know, what are you willing to do to make things better?

And you have to ask yourself that question.

**Jennifer Jackson:** Exactly. How vulnerable are you willing? to get.

**Dr. Carlos Durana:** Yeah. Yeah. That. And, and, and how are you willing to be different in their relationship? Take responsibility for your part in their relationship, you see? That's, that's really important. Uh, yeah, yeah.

**Jennifer Jackson:** you find that that is probably the hardest part of therapy?

Just getting people to lower down their lower down and say Maybe it is me or maybe I need to work on

**Dr. Carlos Durana:** a big deal. That's a big deal. You know, to, to, to really, uh, look at ourselves. I mean, I certainly have that problem. Uh, and, and it's very hard because I know that for me, what it was, you know, it was something having to do with, well, if I acknowledge that I'm contributing to the problem here, that means that I'm not good enough.

And maybe I'm failing at this and, and of course, part of my, my, one of my concerns used to be, you know, perfectionism. I had to be perfect. How can I have, you know, if I have to acknowledge something that I did that is not right, that means there's something wrong with me. I may not be good enough and so on.

So you see that color, my ability to take ownership of my role

in

the problem. You see, those are individual issues that came into my marriage that affected how I responded to. And, and, you know, becomes a problem because that was part of the history that I had of defending myself and, and, and not to acknowledge because otherwise I may say I'm bad, I'm not good enough, you know, I'm making some mistake, which means that I'm not perfect and so on and so on.



Do

**Jennifer Jackson:** Do you feel that that is more common than, than anything else? That, that seems to be one of the main issues that,

that

is brought to you, that people have that issue?

**Dr. Carlos Durana:** Certainly, yeah, that's a very common thing. Yeah, yeah. And you're talking about other problems, uh, you know, and common problems. I mean, people come, sometimes come for other things, infidelity, uh, often, you know, um, as well, those are other issues as well.

Uh, yeah, as well.

**Jennifer Jackson:** Can we talk a little bit more about, How your history affects your relationships. I think that's something that we all kind of have and we are not really quite sure how it, how it changes,

**Dr. Carlos Durana:** how,

**Jennifer Jackson:** how we act now. Can you talk a little bit more about

**Dr. Carlos Durana:** sure. I'll talk a little bit of my own personal history and then I'll talk a little bit of an example of a couple, you know, so that I can, can exemplify that.

So let's say in my own personal history. Like, as I was saying, we all develop certain beliefs about ourselves, and that, that happens before the age of seven. Whether we like it or not, these things are there. They tend to be. Negative. We also have beliefs about ourselves that are positive and both of those form part of our self concept, how we think of ourselves, right?

So for me, some of the things that occur in, in, in, um, watching my parents and my upbringing and all of that, I developed certain beliefs about myself that had to do with not, you know, feeling that somehow I was bad, I was not good, not good enough. And this idea of perfectionism that I mentioned earlier, right?

And, um, And I, part of this was also learned in terms of watching them fight, in terms of their defensiveness. They're attacking one another. Which was, you

know, sometimes relationships can get very hot. Not in a good sense. You can think of it as, uh, Two, you know, flagrant attacks on one another. Nastiness and all of that.

And then you have the opposite where people withdraw and distance from each other. That is just as bad. Sometimes that's even worse. Okay? And so watching them, I learned a lot of the defensiveness and counterattacks and so on. So when my spouse earlier on in my marriage, uh, you know, says something to me, you know, criticism, but it wasn't such a huge thing in retrospect when I looked at afterwards.

Initially my response was modeled like that way, very defensive and so, you know, I attack right back. Well, why are you saying that to me? You do this and that and the other bump, bump, bump, you see right back and, and. I, I never realized at that moment where that response came from inside of me because the actual feedback when I, you know, when I looked at it a step back, later, uh, was not so bad.

So where was that coming from? Well, that was coming from that place in me that at times didn't feel good enough, unworthy, had shame. And had ideas about myself that, that said, I'm not good. I'm not good. I'm bad. So when you gave, when she gave me some feedback, you know, some criticism, my response was coming from there, you see, because I was feeling, God, am I failing here? Again, I was not conscious of this at the moment. Am I failing in this? Am I, maybe I'm not doing a good enough job, you see? Maybe I've done something, I mean, I'm bad.

**Jennifer Jackson:** Did you feel attacked?

**Dr. Carlos Durana:** Well, that's how I experienced it, you see. But that was my response. I mean, it wasn't really such a bad thing, what was being said. But my internal beliefs about myself were driving that response, you see.

Now, this happens in relationship, and I'll give you an example of a couple, where, uh, we all have these vulnerabilities or these, say, call it, uh, trigger points or woundings, let's call them woundings, And some of the worst fights. In a couple, it's when there's a mutual wounding going on. Both people feel wounded at the same time.

And there's this escalation that goes on. And we have to learn how to deal, that's one of the things I teach people, how to deal with escalations. That's very important. And, so let's say there's, I'll give you an example of a couple where

let's say Mary and Mary, her underlying theme in terms of her history was about feeling abandoned, not supported.

Okay? and so when she would feel that way, either something that their partner did or she, you know, that would come up at different points or not feeling supported for her, she would get defensive and react and she would criticize her partner basically what would happen. Now her partner's issue was one also about criticism and unworthiness.

So when he would hear that an attack that, that felt, uh, there was, you know, similar to his wounding, he would react. Negatively, and his defense was to distance.

Now when he distanced, that would trigger her abandonment and not feeling supported because he didn't want to talk, he didn't want to support her and he was being, you know, he would go very passive and he would withdraw and distant himself.

So that would, that would then trigger her further, which would take her into criticism, which would then trigger his wounding about. You know, feeling unworthy and criticize, and then he will get defensive, you see, and they will go back and forth and they're mutually Exacerbating their woundings. Now, she could have started it, he could have started it.

He could have started by just being, feeling unworthy, feeling, uh, distant, distant to begin with because he was afraid of being too vulnerable and so on, right? And he could have started it, right? And then trigger her, and then she would trigger him.

And then there's this sort of, sort of mutual,

**Jennifer Jackson:** mm-hmm

**Dr. Carlos Durana:** um, you escalations going on.

And then both people are wounded at the same time. And each partner feels, you know, you should address my wounding, you know, and the other one feels the same way. And there's almost like a, you know, who's going to go first here. And then that becomes very difficult to navigate that. Okay. And that's where we need to, we need different ways of deescalating from that and exiting from that loop.

It's like a mutually generating, generated loop. Where they're influencing one another in a, in a not, not such a good way, you see, because each one could react differently instead of being defensive or instead of attacking, you see, how can they learn to be vulnerable? She could say, be more vulnerable and talk about, you know, what it is she needed in a constructive way.

He could also become, learn to be more vulnerable about expressing his feelings and so on, you know, they could also, they also needed to learn, um, skills and how to do that and how to communicate better. And address those differences, and so on.

**Jennifer Jackson:** This is some good stuff, Dr. Durana, some really good stuff. Uh,

**Dr. Carlos Durana:** Well, thank you.

I hope, I hope our listeners will take, will benefit from it.

**Jennifer Jackson:** How about this, can you, uh, leave our listeners with, with, uh, maybe a skill or two that maybe they could work on at home?

**Dr. Carlos Durana:** Yeah, well, yeah, sure. I mean, I think at least that's a pointer. And how do we, Something that is really important is, for example, how can we listen to one another and put ourselves in the other person's shoes?

That's a, that's, that's a challenging thing to do. Because what often happens is that our partner says something and we react right away. We don't, in fact, my partner's saying something and I'm already preparing my answer defensively. Okay. And I'm not really fully listening to my partner. Let's face it.

This is what happens. Right.

And so. I come back and strike back, right? And so this is something that is huge, the ability to, okay, let me listen to what my partner is saying. Let me put myself in my partner's shoes and see my partner's perspective from their point of view, as if they're from their shoes, putting myself in there.

So before I respond. to my partner about what it is that they're saying, I'm going to maybe summarize, what am I hearing you say? What are your thoughts and feelings? What's the essence of what you're saying to me? And then reflect that, and try to empathize with it, and validate it as much as I can. This is something that can be learned.

It's a skill. It's not easy. Because I'm having to suspend my defensiveness. Take it, be curious about you. Look at it from your perspective. And, before I give you my response, you see,

Now

I can still disagree with you about how to deal with this and all of that. Just because I empathize with you, I put myself in your shoes doesn't mean that I have to agree with you, but at least I know, I know what you're saying, how you're feeling about this in a deep way.

I understand it. I understand you better. Then I can respond.

**Jennifer Jackson:** That makes sense.

**Dr. Carlos Durana:** And so we can, we need to learn things. I would say because that's something that needs to be learned and it takes time, but at least don't interrupt each other. Pause. Just listen to one another. Take turns. At least, you know, for that, try to think about it in terms of your partner's point of view, putting yourself in their shoes and, and take turns talking to each other.

Try not to interrupt each other. Try that and see what happens. And try to listen to each other in a deeper way, a better way,

**Jennifer Jackson:** Sounds like some pretty good homework to me. Well, Dr. Durana, you gave us a lot of homework today. That's great. Thanks again for joining us today and listeners, if you would like more information on this topic or to schedule an appointment with Dr. Durana, please go to [www.caringapproach.com](http://www.caringapproach.com). This is Jennifer Jackson. Thanks for listening.