

UNDERSTANDING THERAPY



A GUIDE FOR FAMILY LAWYERS SUPPORTING SEPARATING COUPLES

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As family lawyers, we spend much of our professional lives supporting clients through one of the most emotionally challenging times they will ever face. We cannot do our job well without acknowledging the emotional and psychological dimensions of separation alongside the legal ones. This takes many forms: from taking the time to listen to our clients with compassion and patience when they ring us up in a frantic state, to encouraging our clients to engage in NCDR processes which offer more flexibility and are less adversarial than traditional litigation.



Undoubtedly, a significant part of this is also knowing the limits to the support we can provide, and knowing when to signpost. As someone who is both a practising family solicitor and currently training for a MSc in Gestalt

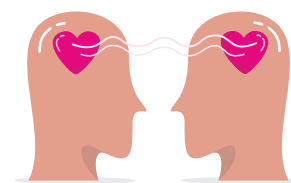
Psychotherapy, I am deeply passionate about the intersection between therapy and family law. With mental health awareness growing and therapy more accessible than ever, many of our clients are seeking—or could benefit from—professional psychological support during the divorce process.

Many of us have personal experience of therapy or have been referring clients to therapists for many years. However, speaking from my own experience, identifying the right form of therapy and the right therapist can seem really overwhelming. Below is a quick guide to the main modalities of therapy that are practiced in the UK today. This is definitely a non-exhaustive list but is a good place to start.

Psychodynamic Therapy

Psychodynamic therapy explores how early life experiences and unconscious processes influence current emotions and relationships. [Enlarge] By bringing deeper patterns into conscious awareness, clients can understand the root of their distress and develop

lasting emotional insight. For someone experiencing separation or divorce, this approach can shed light on recurring relational dynamics and support meaningful, long-term change.



Person-Centred Therapy (PCT)

Rooted in empathy, acceptance, and authenticity, person-centred therapy offers a non-directive and supportive space for individuals to explore their emotions at their own pace.

It assumes people have an innate capacity for growth when provided with the right conditions. For those experiencing the emotional fallout of a relationship breakdown, this approach can be deeply validating, helping them feel heard, respected, and more grounded in their sense of self.

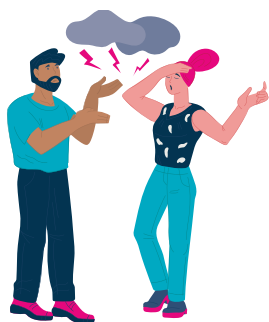


Gestalt Therapy

Gestalt therapy is a dynamic, experiential approach that emphasises awareness, personal responsibility, and the integration of thoughts, emotions, and bodily sensations in the present moment.

Through creative techniques like role-play and dialogue, it helps clients understand themselves more fully and break out of stuck emotional patterns.

For clients navigating separation or divorce, Gestalt therapy offers a powerful space to reconnect with their sense of agency, resolve unfinished emotional business, and move forward with greater clarity and authenticity. Its emphasis on the “here and now” makes it particularly effective for those who feel overwhelmed, fragmented, or emotionally paralysed by change.



Integrative Therapy

Integrative therapy combines elements from different therapeutic models, such as cognitive, humanistic, and psychodynamic approaches, to tailor treatment to the individual's unique needs.

This flexible style makes it particularly well-suited to clients dealing with complex or evolving challenges.

For those going through a stressful life event like divorce, integrative therapy can adapt as their emotional needs shift — from crisis support to deeper personal reflection.



Systemic Or Family Therapy

Systemic therapy considers psychological issues in the context of relationships, focusing on communication patterns and family dynamics.

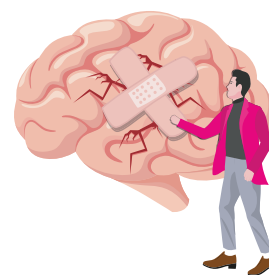
It can involve multiple family members or be used with individuals exploring their relational roles. For families affected by separation or divorce, systemic therapy can help reduce conflict, improve co-parenting communication, and support children in adapting to new family structures.



Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT)

CBT is a practical, structured form of therapy that helps individuals recognise and reframe unhelpful thoughts and behaviours.

By focusing on the present and teaching coping strategies, CBT empowers clients to manage anxiety, depression, and stress. For clients navigating separation or divorce, it can provide immediate tools to reduce emotional overwhelm and regain a sense of stability and control.



Eye Movement Desensitisation And Reprocessing (EMDR)

EMDR is a structured approach originally developed to treat trauma, which helps clients process distressing memories using bilateral stimulation, such as guided eye movements. It allows the brain to reframe painful experiences and reduce their emotional intensity.

For individuals recovering from abusive or traumatic relationship experiences, EMDR can be a powerful way to process those events and support emotional healing post-separation.

Conclusion

Just as clients gravitate toward different lawyers, therapy is not a one-size-fits-all solution. Understanding the broad landscape of therapeutic options allows us, as family lawyers, to better support our clients—not by stepping into the role of therapist, but by confidently signposting them to appropriate resources. By deepening our awareness of how therapy works and what it can offer, we can foster a more holistic, compassionate approach to family law—one that honours both the legal and emotional journeys of the people we serve.

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